



## Marry Me? (A Jopper Fic) by NoniHarbour

**Category:** Jopper - Fandom, Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** F/M, Fanfiction, Fluff and Smut, I Will Go Down With This Ship, Jopper, Shameless Smut, jopper fic

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Chrissy Carpenter, Diane (Stranger Things), Eleven | Jane Hopper, Florence "Flo" (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lonnie Byers, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Sara Hopper, Will Byers, oc female - Character

**Relationships:** Eleven | Jane Hopper & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Jim "Chief" Hopper & Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers & Joyce Byers, Joyce Byers & Eleven | Jane Hopper, Joyce Byers & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers & Will Byers, Joyce Byers/Bob Newby, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper/Bob Newby, Joyce Byers/Lonnie Byers, Mike Wheeler & Eleven, Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

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**Summary:**

A year had passed since El had closed the gate. Hopper would check up periodically on them, but it wasn't needed anymore. He'd see Joyce at the store frequently. But she seemed preoccupied or just avoiding her as of late. Naturally as the gap between them got further he's started to realize how much he needs her. How much he wants her. But now he's sitting in the back row of her wedding, listening to the priest reciting the ceremony. Did he realize too late?

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It is posted on my wattpad under the user SharedTrauma (It is me.)

## 1. Chapter 1

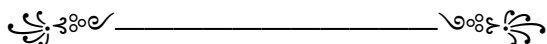
He couldn't believe this was happening again. He found himself sitting at the back of Joyce Byers' wedding. Hiding his feelings under shots of whiskey. He couldn't and wouldn't bring himself to ruin the ceremony. She was his best friend and she was happy. He didn't recognize the groom. Which he found odd but he was more focused on her. How she looked in that white Lacey dress. He sat silent when the priest asked for objections and watched the girl he loved since kindergarten walk away with another man. He held back the tears, stood, and applauded her when they left. Taking out the paper checklist he had saved since when they made it in third grade. Everything was checked off except one, it read "marry her". It had been circled by Joyce decades ago in her then favorite red crayon. But now it was scribbled out completely in black pen. Tears dropped down onto it dampening it. Smudging the date. He was crushed.

He was jolted out of his train of thought by a bright eyed el standing at his bedside. He rubbed his eyes looking around. Drenched in sweat and thoroughly confused he checked the clock. It was 3 am. "Wh—" he got cut off.

"Dad are you ok?" El asked curiously. "You we're making sounds." She climbed into bed next to him hugging him.

"Oh yeah. I had a nightmare, I'm okay" he smiles a little. He's had similar nightmares in the past. But never like that with Joyce. Fuck. He sighed. He doubted she felt anywhere near what he had felt. He wasn't Bob. He certainly wasn't anything like him. He was nothing more than a damaged fuck-up junkie. But to the little girl lying next to him, he was everything. Well almost— Mike was everything. He hugged her tightly. "Thank you kid."

She smiled and snuggled closer. "You're welcome daddy. I'm glad you're okay" Hop and Mike were everything to her. She hid the fact that she was scared by his nightmares. He seemed to be in so much pain. But he said he was okay so that was enough for her to slip into a few hours of deep sleep. He wasn't far behind.



Those four hours had passed too fast in his opinion. But he had to get El ready for school. It had been over a year since it happened. He, the boys, and Joyce Byers had helped her catch up if not pass the boys in preparation of her starting school that past September. She loved it, especially since Mike is in the majority of her classes. It was 7:15 and El was begging him to be driven. It snapped him out of his thoughts. "Alright. Kid, let's go. Remember if anything happens call me immediately."

"I know dad" she cut him off. It was the same thing he told her every day. He chuckled and made small talk the whole way to school. He had pulled up behind a familiar olive green Pinto, but was snapped out of his stare by El. "... I love you dad.. you sure you're alright?"

"Oh. Yeah.. I love you too. Have fun" he smiled.

She went to shut the door but saw what he was looking at, so before shutting the door she said one more thing. "Go talk to her" she shut the door and sprinted off to catch up with Mike, Dustin, Lucas, Will and Max.

He watched as Joyce wrapped her sweater closer around her and walked towards her car pulling out a cigarette. She didn't have work today, he knew that. So he got out and grabbed his jacket. "Joyce!" He said with a smile, half startling her. "Oops sorry. I didn't mean to startle you" he chuckled unsure of what to say.

She jumped at his loud voice "Jesus hopper!" She laughed a bit "that's one way to scare the crap out of me." She smiled as he stood next to her leaning on her car as well. He pulled out one of his cigarettes and lit it.

"Where's your coat?" He could tell she was freezing. It's early November, in the morning, in Indiana. It gets pretty damn cold.

"I forgot it. Stupidly." She sighed. Hop took the opportunity to drape his heavy police jacket around her. "Oh Hop no I can't take this from you. You need it for work" she squirmed a bit but eventually gave in with a smile once she felt how warm it was. It smelled like him.

"Take it. I've got a spare. I'd rather you use it and it keeps you warm

over it just sitting in the truck collecting dust" he pulls her closer rubbing her back. Hoping it'll shake off any chill she had left.

"Thank you Hop" she said with a smile. She hadn't seen him in a while, and she admittedly missed her friend. He wouldn't come in anymore if El came over. He's just drop her off and go. "Is.. everything okay Hop?" It was as if she read his mind.

"I was just about to ask you the same.. are you okay Joyce?" he dodged her question, but waited for the answer to his.

She nodded. "Yeah. I just haven't seen you or well really talked to you in what feels like ages. Now answer my question" she had picked up on his dodge and knew what he was doing by deflecting it.

"Yeah I guess. Everything's great with El and she loves school. Work's been dead, I've just kinda.. yeah I'm okay" he wasn't ready to tell her about his latest repeat nightmare.

It was like she knew. "Hop.." she took his hand. "Whatever it is. You can tell me. You were there for me through everything. Believed in me when no one else did. The least I can do is be here for you. So talk to me. Please." She pleaded. She missed her friend, she missed him coming around, she missed him. But she didn't know what that was. With Lonnie she never missed a thing, only regretted everything.

"Well. I guess I just feel like I've lost a purpose or a part of me. But I'll find it.. how about we go for coffee?" he was panicking, the police radio cracked and drew his attention away and gave him an out. "Actually I'm sorry I have to take this. Keep the coat" he got in and sped off, before she could say anything. She was stunned and heartbroken. She wanted to fix him. But had no idea how. Or any idea that she was the part missing. So she watched him drive off, left standing there alone in a coat that smells like him.

## 2. Chapter 2

It had been about a week since he had last talked to Joyce— well talking is subjective. More like just leaving her in the cold. He was embarrassed and ashamed. He didn't think she cared but little did he know, it killed her. She hated seeing him like that. There was something going on. She figured he was missing Diane- Sarah, or someone. She had to find him.

He wasn't sure where he was off too but he was headed somewhere. Just a drive he guessed. El was in school and was going to Mike's after so as long as he was home by six he would be okay. He swung briefly by the station to say hello to Flo and the guys. But he didn't stick around.

About an hour after he left for his journey Joyce came to the station. "Is the chief here?" She almost seemed frantic.

"No I'm afraid not. He left an hour ago. No word as to where he was going. I'll radio him. What's wrong Ms. Byers?" Oh how she hated being called that. But it didn't matter currently. She needed to talk to him

"I just need to talk to him. Tell him I can meet him wherever he is if that's easier."

Flo nodded and radioed to him, explaining the situation. Hop heard it and sighed. Telling her he'd be out of town for most of the day and to direct her towards cal, or the newest addition to the police force, Steve Harrington.

Joyce sighed and insisted on only speaking to him. "When is he getting back, did he say?"

"By 6 tonight. Els at the Wheelers."

She sighed. Flo radioed back sensing something more was up, noting how odd it was for him to just leave like this anyway "hop where are you"

"Out of town Flo" he said blankly back.

"No. Tell me exactly where you are." Flo had a way about her that knew how to get him to answer her.

"Route 40 just outside of Roane, the little diner. Flo don't send anyone up. I'm fine. Okay?" Flo knew the place and wrote down the name and address and passed it to Joyce.

"I won't send anyone. I'm just worried about you hop." She lied.

Joyce was gone and speeding off in her car. Flying well over the speed limit. He knew she wanted to talk so her fear was that he'd catch on and leave. She didn't know what she was doing. But she felt she had to do it. Something made her do it. She nearly forgot to put her car in park when she pulled in. But she ran in. Her anxiety and worry through the roof. She was breathing heavy and frantically searching around for the familiar face. Everyone stared at the slightly disheveled frantic woman standing in the entrance to the doorway.

Hop didn't expect this out of everything. He didn't put two and two together. He froze midway through going to take a sip of coffee before putting it down. "Joyce? Are you alright?" He looked her over thinking something was wrong with will. "Is will alright?"

"Hop oh thank god!" She sighed and sat down next to him. "I - we need to talk- yeah he's fine. It's about us."

"Us?" He looked puzzled. Trying to pretend he didn't nearly open up to her a week ago.

"Yes us. You haven't talked to me or seen me in a week. I've called.. I I. Hop what's going on? You asked me to coffee and you said that you felt a part of you missing... then you vanish, without a word. I'm scared. You're one of my closest friends hop.. I don't know what I'd do if I lost you."

"I-I'm fine Joyce. There's no need to worry about me. I'll be fine." He looked back down at his coffee. Offering no more explanation or really showing no more interest in talking about it.

"I don't believe you for a second." She says taking his hand. She



wanted to cry, she wanted to scream, she wanted him to talk to her more than anything and she wasn't sure why she was feeling this way. She had never experienced anything like this with Lonnie. And with her boys it was different. She got snapped out of her thoughts and brought back into reality when Hop gently brushed her hand with his thumb as he held it.

"Joy.." he looked so broken and vulnerable for a moment. "I've been having nightmares. And I'm convinced I'm gonna lose El some how and you. I'm a black hole Joyce. I don't want you getting sucked in with me. Cause it destroys everything I love." He didn't even register what he said.

Her jaw had dropped slightly at his last few words. Everything he loves. She searched for the words to say to reassure him. And he looked at her for a response. It was probably a matter of a few seconds but she still hadn't said anything and he registered fully what he had said. He unintentionally revealed he loved her and she said nothing.

By the time 15 seconds passed she managed to say "Hop it won't get us." She panicked, did she love him? She did. But she didn't know how to say it.

Or we'll was too scared to say it.

"Excuse me" hop said motioning as he got up. He pulled away and laid down cash on the table. Not looking at her, any hope he maybe had gone.

"Hop wait!" She quickly said trying to stop him. But he was out of arms reach. He ignored her and just kept walking. She couldn't stop him.

30 seconds had passed. Hop had sped off leaving his heart on the table. And she just watched her whole world come crashing down.

### 3. Chapter 3

30 seconds. It can be the matter between life and death. 30 seconds. You'll think about 25 thoughts. Your heart will beat about 36 times. You'll breath 8 times. Your body will produce 72 million red blood cells and travel 4 miles. It doesn't seem like much but in 30 seconds, everything can change.

In a matter of 30 seconds her whole world crashed down. She watched the man she loved walk out all because she was too naive to realize she loved him. Now the opportunity passed. He opened himself up and got nothing in response. Now he locked himself back up and sped off to god knows where, leaving her to sit in her car and sob. She fucked it up. Big time.

Hopper never had been great about saying his feelings. So what he said was huge for him. He usually just tensed up and got mad and yelled. But this time he opened up and it backfired. He pulled back into Hawkins and went into the station going to Flo. "Next time she comes in here looking for me? Either let her wait til I get home or pass her off to Steve." He snapped. He was so tense, so mad, so hurt.

"Whoa, chief. Calm down, what- what happened? I was only trying to help. She looked concerned about you too." Flo wasn't too thrilled about being yelled at but she could tell. "Oh Hop.." she sighed. Almost in a motherly way and went over and hugged him. No one else was there so he let her. "If she comes by Ill tell her your radio is shut off. And you're taking vacation time or something. I'll manage"

Joyce drove back. By now it was almost time to get will. Jonathan was off at NYU and Nancy had followed. So it was up to her to pick up will. She did her best to appear decent for him. She waited patiently for will. Who soon appeared and walked over to the car. Immediately knowing something was wrong.

"Mom. What's wrong?" He said once he got settled.

"Nothing honey. I'm fine" she forced a smile. She could take a smile but she couldn't hide what her eyes told.

"Whatever it is mom, it'll be okay. We'll figure it out. We always do." Will smiled his cute little smile at her and for a second she believed it but soon the events of the day flooded back

"Let's get you home and your homework started" she turned the car on and brought Will home in silence. Will didn't push any further and started his homework as he was told to. Joy sat down for a cigarette on her porch. Hers weren't as strong as his. Well nothing of hers was as strong as his except maybe her dedication. She was tiny compared to him. In all aspects. Her thoughts bounced between the night Bob died and the night Hop really first held her. As they were standing outside he Snow Ball. The first time he had really held her since high school and before Lonnie. "Damn it!" She said. "Damn it. Damn it damn it" she curled into a ball. Her anxiety and stress taking over. She started to cry again and couldn't stop.

Hop had gone back to the cabin. Unable to stop thinking about that dream he had a week prior. He pulled a box or two out of storage and dug through the papers, pictures and drawings from his past. Soon he found what he was looking for. A small folded up piece of paper. With the bottom box left unchecked and circled in her favorite red crayon. He put the box back but moved it to his night table putting it in the top draw and sat down to think. Maybe avoiding her isn't the right approach. I'm not in high school anymore. He sighed and looked around the room. Dark. Empty. Cold.. he sighed again looking at the picture of Sarah in his draw and glanced to his stash of pills and booze he hid in the closet years before. He didn't move for them. He just sat and stared. I'm just the town drunk. A useless small town junkie. Joyce Byers deserves better. The front door opening and closing with small footsteps coming in broke him out of his trance.

"Dad! I'm home!" A cheerful El shouted. He wasted no time. He hurried himself out and hugged her tighter than ever.

"Dad.. I love you" she hugged him back tightly. Just knowing he was upset. "Is it about Ms Byers,dad?"

"What how did you..?" He furrowed his brow.

"I stopped home earlier to grab something with Mike and she called. I

didn't know where you were so I took a message for you. And wrote it down." She pointed to the little notecard on the table by the phone. "And dad I found this on the way in." She hands him an envelope.

Hop pulled away and went over to the note. Reading just the 'I'm sorry' and nothing more it just made him sigh. He opened the envelope it was from his old police chief back in New York City. A position had just opened up and he wanted to know if he may be interested in returning. He thought about it, it seemed like the perfect out. The noise of El plopping down onto the couch made him look up and realize it's not just his life he'd be uprooting but hers too. That's the last thing he'd want to do to her, she had been through so much already. No matter how badly he wanted to go. He wasn't going to ruin her life that she had finally settled in to.

He placed the offer open by the phone as a reminder to call him back and decline it. But for now he was going to sit down and watch some tv with his family. His. He liked the sound of that. And for once that day he really smiled.

## 4. Chapter 4

She woke well before her alarm. Checking the phone immediately for a call. For something. He had been avoiding her for days. She couldn't take it any longer. She checked the clock. 4:32 am. The sun was barely starting to rise, and here she found herself grabbing her keys, and rushing out the door in his winter police coat and pjs. Will was being picked up by the Wheelers later that Saturday to stay the night. He was so excited. She drove to Hops cabin, pushing any second guessing to the back of her mind. She didn't care that it was now 4:45 am. She had to do this. Or else it was going to kill her. She walked onto the porch and knocked tears streaming down her face, from a mix of nerves and sadness. She wanted to be held by him. She needed to be held by him. She heard someone move inside the house.

El opened the door quietly. "Cmon in Ms Byers" She smiled without hesitation and moved out of the way to let her in. Almost as if she knew she was there or that she was coming. "I'll get daddy. Then go back to bed" Joyce nods and watches as she disappears into Hops bedroom.

Hop was in a deep sleep. But felt the nudges and stirred. "What..? What's wrong?" His sleepy lids glanced to her and the clock. "It's 5 am. What's wrong?"

"It's Joyce." She says firmly. Purposely omitting the fact that she was standing in his living room.

He sat up, she wouldn't normally wake him unless it's urgent. "What's wrong with Joyce?"

"I don't know. You should go see. It's important" as she spoke he stood up in just an undershirt and flannel loose pants. He grabbed his keys and headed out of his room. Stopping dead in his tracks as he sees the petite woman wearing his coat, in silk pajamas biting her nails nervously as tears streamed down her face. His heart melted.

She lit up when she saw him walk in, but didn't move towards him. She clearly was trying to form words but all she could do was shrug and put her arms up while trying to stifle a sob. "What are we doing

hop..?" She managed to say.

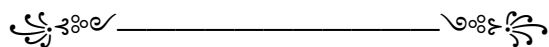
He couldn't take it, he didn't care that she caused him to be woken up. He didn't care that he had 3 hours of sleep. He didn't care about any of his problems because none of it mattered anymore. None of it mattered because there she was. He didn't say a word. He hurried over to her and put his hands on her cheeks cupping them as he bent down to kiss her. She didn't hesitate to kiss back. He sat her down on the couch eventually braking the kiss off earlier than she wanted. She whimpered a little and moved closer to him. "Hold on Joyce. Hear me out" he chuckles slightly hearing her whimper. "I've been really stupid. And an ass.. but fuck joy... I love you. I've never stopped loving you. I'm so sor-"

She cut him off by kissing him. Lifting herself into his lap so she can reach easily. She needed to feel his beard scratching against her cheeks, she needed him. She needed this. She pulled away to respond to him. "I forgive you. I love you. And I'm sorry too." She smiled widely and curled up against his chest. Realizing now just how tired she was. She felt safe and happy for the first time in a long time.

He rubbed her side gingerly. "How long have you been up for?" He noticed how tired she seemed and frankly he was too.

"As soon as I woke up I came here. I want to continue this later.. I need to" she smirked and yawned. "I'm sorry but I'm exhausted. This is the first time I've been relaxed since I started this mess.." she cuddled closer to him. Showing no intention of leaving just sleep.

He smiled widely. "Don't apologize. There's no need. I'm sorry I didn't talk to you sooner. But you showing up here is just what I needed. Now. How about we take this to bed where it's more comfortable and there's more room" he stood up and carried her. She nodded already half asleep. He laid her down and curled up behind her. Wrapping his arms around her and spooning her. Kissing the back of her neck, gently resting his head against hers as they both drifted to sleep. He felt like he was finally home.



7:30 am. Hop's alarm blared and an annoyed sigh came out of his

mouth before he turned it off. Joyce had moved and shifted now curled as close as possible next to him. He hated to move but he had to get ready for work.

She woke as he got up. "Nooo. You have work don't you?" She frowned sleepily.

He sighed. "Yeah. I do." He frowned. "Maybe you could swing by and we could... hang out in my office.." he smirked.

"James Anthony Hopper. You naughty man!" She laughed loudly. Clearly very happy. She sits up. "I have to call Will."

He nodded laughing. "I'll get breakfast started." He kisses her gently.

She reciprocates by gently tugging at his lower lip. She was met by a low guttural growl of pleasure from him. Oh boy, did that turn her on. She felt herself get wet, her lower stomach grew warm and desire ignited in her and he knew it. He kissed back, placing his hands on her ass lifting her up so his waist is right in between her legs. He kissed at her neck and she let out soft moans. "H-hop" she shifted her hips desperate for some friction. He smirked and put her down.

Her eyes grew wide and she whimpered annoyed and desperate. "Hop why'd you stop?" She was fully aroused and ready to go.

"Cause I've got work." He smirks knowing fully what he's done to her. "You better be ready for me later or else you'll be cuffed" he smirked.

Her jaw dropped not fully expecting that but it soon turned into a devilish grin. "If I'm naughty.. will you arrest me officer?" She propped herself up on the bed giving him a smirk and a proper stare down.

He doesn't say a word but he gives her a smirk and a nod before he headed off to the kitchen. It got his head spinning when she called him officer. Fuck. How was he gonna last the whole day in his office knowing she will be waiting for him. He was lost in his thoughts for a while before he heard her half sob and ask. "You're leaving Hawkins...?"

## 5. Chapter 5

He spun around completely confused and caught off guard by the question. He knew exactly what she was holding when he saw the paper. "Oh no no. It says call back as a reminder to decline. No. I'm not going anywhere" he walks over to her and hugs her.

"Oh" she chuckled slightly embarrassed by jumping to conclusions. "I just couldn't help myself.. I assumed the worst. I'm sorry" she kissed him, wanting to forget it happened she nips at the lobe of his ear and whispers. "I'll see you later officer." Brushing herself against him as she lowered herself back off of her tippy toes, grabbing her keys.

He let out another small growl mixed with an exhale of pleasure. He quickly snapped out of it when he saw her grab her keys "you're leaving?" He looked a mix of sad, disappointed, deprived, and confused.

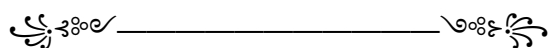
"I gotta do breakfast for Will." She also wanted to find the perfect pair of undergarments for him. She hasn't gone shopping for herself in absolute ages. Lonnie never really liked her. He never commented on what looked good on her so she didn't know.. well she didn't think anything did.

"Dinner and more later? Isn't Will staying over at Mike's too? I know el is excited.."

She nodded. "Dinner and more later. And maybe a surprise visit during the day. Better hope you have lots of paperwork"

He kissed her while nodding. "I love you. 6 tonight?"

"I love you too, and yes. 6 it is." She gave him one more quick kiss before slipping back into her car. She was ecstatic. She made it home and made Will his breakfast, not answering the multitude of nosy questions that he already knew the answers to.



A few hours later she finally found herself at a Victoria's Secret in the



mall. She sighed looking at all the choices but even more so at the prices. She wanted help but had no idea what Hopper even liked. Even though she was fairly sure it didn't matter what, she knew he still had preferences. She finally settled on a very skimpy but pretty black Lacey bra with matching panties. It didn't cost as much as she expected so she had some left over to spend on a new top, which she decided to go for. That she found easy. She had been eyeing a simpler but gorgeous white tank top. It was a thicker material so she could conceal the surprise below and it looked great on her. She loved it. She went home, did her makeup, and made sure her hair looked decent before grabbing a coat and heading off to find hop. Hoping he was at the station.

He had been glancing up at the police station entrance all day. It was pretty quiet, Flo was very confused as to why he asked for all the paperwork he could get. But when Joyce walked in it all started to make some sense. Especially since she didn't look like her typical self. Joyce had a great figure. It wasn't perfect, I mean bearing two children isn't the most forgiving. But she was thin, just a few stretch marks here and there. Hop wasn't perfect either and she loved it, it didn't matter to her.

She motioned to hops office as she quietly walked in, Flo just nodded smiling slightly. She hadn't seen Hop this happy in well.. ever. But she liked it. The butterflies in Joyce's stomach rose as she got closer to the room. She didn't knock or say a word she leaned against the doorway silently waiting for Hop who was thoroughly engrossed in paperwork to notice. She started mentally counting. 15 seconds.. 20... 30. His eyes glanced up and it took him a moment but he did a double take and grinned widely, slowly looking her over. "Fuck Joyce. You look. Fuck." He

She gave him a confused look. "I look.. fuck..? Didn't realize that was a term of endearment." A smile formed and turned into a giggle, which then got him laughing.

"You look absolutely amazing. You always do. It's leaving me speechless" He's practically drooling.

She blushed deeply. She had never really been talked to like this. She stepped in further and closed the door locking it from behind her.

She took the paperwork from his hands and put it on the desk. She slid herself into his lap straddling him, kissing him with a purpose. "Hop.." she moaned softly into the kiss. Not any less turned on than before, if only more. She was more frantic, more desperate than before. She grinded against him desperate for friction. He leaned his head back letting out a few low guttural moans as he grew harder and harder underneath her. She kissed at his beard, making a trail along his jawline down his unshaven neck.

"Oh fuck joy.." he growled out sliding hand under her shirt rubbing her sides. It made a chill run up her spine. He was about ready to slip her shirt down to kiss and explore her chest. But Flo radioed in. "Hate to do this to you chief but we've got a situation. Someone broke into the radio shack on route 5. The caller says the suspect is still there, you're the only one here."

Joyce sighed "damn it." She climbed off of him and fixed her shirt and anything else that was disturbed in their little encounter.

Hopper was clearly pissed. "Damn it Flo! Now? Really!? I'm on it." He was visibly hard, she liked that. Knowing that it was her who had that much of an impact on him. He frowned and shot her an 'I'm sorry look' before grabbing his keys and hat and leaving. He quickly stuck his head in before going. "You. Stay." She didn't plan on staying and waiting for him. He had work to do. She respected that. She also knew people were gonna catch on but at this point she didn't care. She loved him and he loved her. That was that.

## 6. Chapter 6

Flo gave Joyce a look as she reappeared out of his office. Joyce almost didn't notice, as she was too busy fixing her bangs. "Flo. I saw that" she chuckled. "What's that about?"

"Honey you know damn well what I'm gonna ask you about. He's happy. He's never happy. I take it, you both just recently came to your senses? I've been waiting for years. You two have had chemistry since I met him."

That made her blush and grin. "We met in kindergarten. And we were an on and off thing throughout high school up until I stupidly chose Lonnie over him. God. How I regret it in a way... but yeah. We're happy. Took me showing up at his house at 4 am but it was worth it." She grinned looking down at some spot on the floor reminiscing. "I better go find our chief. Since steve just brought in the perp. He hasn't radioed has he?" She started to get concerned.

"No he hasn't. I'm sure he's fine." Flo reassured. "I'll call you if he shows up while you're gone."

Joyce nodded and proceeded to her car. She looked around. Hopper was nowhere to be seen. She started to drive around. Cranking the heat. By now it was nearing Christmas and the temperature dropped greatly. She got more concerned when the first snow of the year started to fall and it started coming down hard. It didn't take her long to notice her car stalling. She pulled over but couldn't get it to restart. "Damn it! Shit!" She sighed pulling out her extra blanket and hops coat she kept in the car, just in case for situations like this. She flipped on her hazards and made sure she was well covered. The heat in her car will only last for so long. She couldn't help but doze off slightly. She woke up freezing to a semi frantic tap on the window. She was met with a blinding flashlight. She opened the car door to find a very worried hop.

"What are you doing out her joy?! Are you okay?!" He carried her to his truck. "God your freezing. How long have you been there?!" The heat from his Chevy blazer seeped everywhere. It was very warm.

"I don't know. My damn car broke down again." She sighed. "It was when the snow first started falling."

"Shit joy. That was 2 hours ago." He put her in his lap and sped off towards her house. Everyone was still at Mikes for the sleepover so it was just the two of them. But right now he was more focused on keeping her safe and warm. Sex can wait. No matter how badly he wanted her. He could feel her shivering as he drove to the house. He parked in front and carried her in. Making sure the heat was on and everything was shut. He grabbed extra blankets and curled up next to her on the couch. "Are you feeling okay babe?" He felt her forehead and she nodded. Seeming to be more aware and less out of it now that she had warmed up.

She felt fine. "You know what'll warm me up more than anything?"

"What's that?" He held her close rubbing her side gently. Leaning his head on hers.

"Well officer.." she smirked

He didn't play along at first. "Joyce are you sure you're up for this? It's not gonna be very enjoyable if you're not. And I really want it to be something you never forget." He smirks a little.

"Yes. I am.. please. I've wanted to all day." She rubbed his lower stomach. He sighed and started to give in. He kissed her and she quickly returned the kiss. Sliding up into his lap she kissed him deeply again. His hands found their way up and down her body. They made their way up to her shirt straps which he used to easily slide the shirt off of her. Revealing the bra she purchased earlier.

He let out a growl staring at her breasts. Biting his lower lip he broke the kiss. "Fuck Joyce. You're so fucking hot." He said between small kisses planted down her neck. He unhooked her bra and dropped it to the floor. His rough hands were planted firmly on the side of her breasts. His thumbs brushed and teased her nipples, small moans left her mouth. But he didn't kiss her to silence her. He kissed at her collarbone again. Then down her chest until he met a nipple. He nipped and tugged, sucking while he massages the other in his other hand.

"Hopper!" She shakily managed to say as she reached down for his belt. He moved her hands away and stopped sucking giving her a look. "I'm sorry officer. I've been bad.." she smirked and slid herself along him. "I think you should arrest me" she slipped off his shirt, sliding closer to him. Whispering "arrest me" she smirked.

A fire was ignited in his eyes. He pulled out his cuffs. "Turn around with your hands behind your back." He whispered into her ear, kissing the base of her neck as she turns. He loosely placed one cuff on but got interrupted by the phone. He sighed breaking character.

"Oh come on!" She cried out. "Hop ignore it. Please." She was so desperate at this point. This was the third time today something had interrupted them. Even though it definitely will make the release even better shes tired of waiting. The phone rang until it stopped. She grinned "now offic—" it rang again. She whimpered "Damn it!"

"I'll get it. If they called twice it's probably important" he moved her off his lap and stood. He was hard again and seemed uncomfortable in his pants now. He answered the phone. "Hello?.. Yes this is Hop.. no.. just dinner.. what's up?.. uh huh.. okay.. alright. I'll be right there.. bye." He hung up the phone and sighted putting his fingers to the bridge of his nose looking so defeated. "I'm sorry baby. I ha-"

"Have to go. I get it. The storm. I'll wait for you." She smiled and kissed him handing him his shirt and coats. "Stay warm. Stay safe. I'll be here, waiting for you." She kisses him smiling. Hiding how disappointed she was. She redressed herself and got comfy on the couch starting a movie. It wasn't long before sleep consumed her and she was out like a light.

## 7. Chapter 7

She had migrated to her bed after the couch got too uncomfortable about an hour after he left. When she first woke she had found in his haste, he left his hat, so she brought it with her before falling back asleep. She was woken up again hearing someone come in the door. She assumed it was Hop. So she put on his hat to surprise him and came out to find him.

"Mom!" Jonathan smiled widely seeing her but then it turned quizzical. Nancy followed behind and smiled and waved. She caught on quicker to what was going on and giggled.

She quickly realized that it wasn't Hop so she took off his hat and grabbed a blanket to cover her shoulders. "Jonathan! Nancy! What are you doing here!"

"It's winter session mom.. why are you cuffed..? Is that hopper's hat? Who did this to you?! Did they hurt you?" He was getting angry.

Nancy grabbed his arm to calm him. "No Jonathan.. uhm." She giggled.

"No no Jonathan I'm fine. He was just over for dinner to check on me in the storm he forgot his hat."

"And his cuffs apparently?" Jonathan was angry. Nancy hit him. "Stop it. Leave her alone. She deserves to be happy too." She shot an apologetic look at Joyce.

"Thank you Nancy, Jonathan don't worry about it. He hasn't hurt me. He w—" Hop burst through the door.

"Joyce oh my god if I won't be able to fuck you this time and for the fourth time something interrupts us today it will literally.. kill.. me." He only just noticed Nancy and Jonathan standing in the living room as he said the last few words. He turned a new shade of red and looked mortified.

Joyce couldn't stop him. It was too late. "Well. Jonathan and Nancy

are home for the winter.." is the only thing she managed to say stifling embarrassed giggles.

"We're gonna go.. visit my parents. You two don't let us ruin your night." Nancy ushered Jonathan, who looked even angrier now, towards the door. Hop stepped away from the door. "Have a good night guys" Nancy says before getting into his car.

"Uhm.." Hop wasn't sure what to say.

"They'll get over it.. damn it Hop. Come here. Just fuck me already before someone needs you again." She whined and he picked her up. "Bed"

He nodded and hurried her in. He laid her down and helped her undress herself. He went to unlock the one pair of handcuffs but she stops him

"Cuff me." It caught him off guard slightly but he nodded smirking. He loosely cuffed her hands together and then to the headboard. She nodded "that's perfect officer" she smirked. He kissed down her chest to the elastic of her pants. She loved the feeling of his beard, his rough hands feeling her all over, his lips. "Damn it Hop" she moaned

He smirked and slipped off her pants. She helped kick off his revealing his large, thick member. She had mostly forgotten, or well it seemed bigger than she remembered. "Like what you see?" He took notice to the fact she was biting her lower lip, she nodded quickly. Admittedly she was scared. It had been too long since she last had done anything. Bob was okay. He meant well but it just wasn't great. "Close your eyes" she looked confused at first but did as she's told. She quickly knew why he asked that. So she had no idea what was coming, and he could tease her as much as he wanted. He slid himself back up so their heads were level. She felt his hot breath on her neck and his rough fingers rubbing her core. "Tell me how badly you want me baby.." he whispered.

"S-so badly. Please. Please hop. Fuck me." Her voice was on the quieter side, vulnerable and scared.

It was as if he could read her mind. He knew that's how she felt. He

gingerly kisses her. "Hey, joy, I'll take care of you. Open your eyes baby." He gently stroked her cheek, gingerly kissing her. She opened them and smiled giving him an approving nod. He slid his body over her protectively, uncuffing her before moving any further. She immediately wrapped her arms around him and relaxed even more.

"I'm ready" she nodded and grinned. Her wrists bruised. But she didn't care. He slowly slid himself into her fully. She let out a loud moan which was met with a grunt from him. "Oh fuck.. Hopper.. fuck" she adjusted to his size and he waited, he wanted to care for her in all ways possible. She shifted her hips desperate for him to move. "Please hop. Oh god"

Hop slid out fully and back in, grunting again. He set a steady, hard, deep pace for her. She rocked with him, the bed creaked at every move. Her moans met his, until she felt herself coming closer and closer. "Hop fuck. I I. I'm close!" She moaned out.

"Come for me baby." He manages to say in between grunts and growls. She let herself come, her whole body shaking and tightening. "Oh fuck joy! You're so tight!" His thrusts became sporadic and shaky but he pushed her through her high coming down with her thrusting a few more times emptying himself fully into her. All that can be heard was heavy breaths. She broke the silence.

"Hop that was.." she gleamed, still catching her breath. "So needed... so perfect. I I've never felt this loved before.. I I.." she started to cry. She was so ecstatic and new to this aspect of it.

He removed himself and quickly pulled her close. Speaking softly he said "Don't cry baby. Please don't cry. You're so loved. You, el, the boys are the world to me. Don't cry." He tried to soothe her he hated how Lonnie had hurt her. "Oh honey. What did he do to you?" Her sobs started to subside the more he held her, the more she knew he wasn't going to leave. She had been abandoned so many times before by Lonnie right after that she expects it from everyone. He got a damp towel and gently cleaned her up, something Lonnie never did. He got her comfy pjs, that he bought her as a surprise and put them on her. Kissing her gently at her bruises and marks. Pulling her as close as possible. She felt so special. More than words could describe. "I love you, Jim Hopper." She sleepily said. He sleepily



"I love you, Joyce Byers."

## 8. Chapter 8

She woke alone. It made her panic. He wasn't there, she expected him to be there. He loved her so why wasn't he? She couldn't help it. She started to cry. She curled up and sobs started to rock her body. She wanted a cig but left her pack in the kitchen so she made her way out and stopped in her tracks seeing him making breakfast for them with the table set.

He heard her walk in. "Morning sleepy head I- what's wrong?" He put the food down and ran over to her noticing the tears streamed down her face.

"I thought you left me. I thought I became just another one of those girls you fucked and then left. Just one of those flings. I I'm sorry" she sobbed into his arms as he hugged her tightly.

"I would never." It hurt to hear his reputation repeated, and that she thought he'd do that to her. But he put that aside. His main focus right now was on making her feel safe and loved, nothing else. He had earned his reputation. So he had to live with it. But she wasn't a fling, she wasn't some random girl. She's the girl he's been in love with since they met. "I would never ever hurt you. Not intentionally. I love you. I love you so fucking much it hurts knowing what you went through. Knowing I couldn't save you from it. But from now on I'm taking care of you. Until you don't want me to anymore." Tears flashes in his eyes at the thought that she may not want him anymore at some point. "I love you Joyce Byers. I always have and I always will."

She couldn't help but grin wiping her tears. "Ya well we'll see if that still stands when we're both 90 sitting on a porch and were bickering cause we're that little old couple that everyone aspires to be. I will never not want you. I should've checked the house before jumping to conclusions. Hell hop I can see your truck from our bedroom window!" She giggled again, calming down. "Thank you..." she kissed him, limping slightly to her seat. "What's for breakfast?"

He raised one brow and smirked a little. "Well well Joy, a little sore are we?" He shot her a sly devious look, followed by a guilty grin.

"Pancakes."

"Shut up" she giggled embarrassed. "Your fault." She gleamed. She loved the thought of that. "What made you realize that now or well when you first started opening up to me a few weeks ago, that you needed to tell me how you truly felt?"

"Well that's a long story." He chuckles slightly, pretty embarrassed about the dream he had.

She sat there listening. Waiting for him to say something. "And..? What is it? I've got time" she laughed.

"I I.. well." He tried to word it in a way that wouldn't seem slightly creepy. I mean after all he was dreaming about her wedding. "I had a nightmare really.. it was your wedding—"

"My wedding is your nightmare?" She looked puzzled.

He chuckled "No. Well yes. But it wasn't our wedding. I was there though. You invited me to your wedding with some guy I'd never seen before but I wasn't going to ruin it for you so I watched your dad hand you off and you marry this guy. And.. well I woke up realizing how I truly felt.. I mean I've always known but I couldn't let another Lonnie or another Bob swoop you up." He sighed slightly, sharing his feelings like this, aren't easy for him.

She teared up at not just the mentioning of Bob, cause she did miss him. But she loved Hop, she felt for him. "Hop I honestly understand that. I heard about Diane shortly after I divorced Lonnie. I figured you were gone forever. I mean you moved off to New York. And then when you came back, you didn't seem too interested in serious relationships. And I honestly after Lonnie didn't even think about ever getting married again. But bob came along. And I mean I loved him. I did but I just something didn't feel right. Something just didn't click.. I would've married him. If we'll he... probably moved out to Maine like he had wanted. It seemed like the perfect out." She sniffled wiping away a few escaped tears. "But hop, if he didn't die.. if I moved to Maine I wouldn't be happy. I'm so glad you finally wised up to well at least make me aware of your feelings. So I didn't find that guy in your dreams and have both you and my father hand me

over to someone I wouldn't be truly happy with. I'm happy now Hop. Just knowing that we're.. us. Even though it's still so new. I'm happy"

Hop grinned widely and took her hands. "I'm happy too. Really happy. What are we going to tell Will and El?"

She sighed. "Well if Johnathan and Nancy haven't said anything already, I think we should tell them. I mean they're already best friends. Els like a daughter to me already."

"Wills like a son to me. Jonathan too if he manages to not hate me after yesterday"

"Oh he doesn't hate you!" She jokingly hits his arm and digs in to the pancake placed in front of her. "He may be mortified but, it's not the first time or the last. He likes you. He didn't like Bob.." she took a bite and slid closer to him lighting a cigarette. Glancing at the clock he figured Will would be coming home with Jonathan anytime soon now. "The boys will be home so-" just as she spoke the front door swung open. Jonathan, Will and El came bounding in.

"Hi dad! Ms By- can I call you mom?" It was clear Jonathan had mentioned them being together.

Joyce laughed a little. "Yes you can call me mom." She hugged her, Will and Jonathan as they all took their respective places at the table grabbing pancakes. Everything seemed alright for once. Seemed.

## 9. Chapter 9

Everything seemed to be okay. But this is Hawkins. A tiny little town in Indiana where everyone knows everybody. Why wouldn't it be okay?

It had been a few weeks since they got together. It was Christmas Eve, everything had been going so perfect. But now everything happened so fast it was a blur. Carrying in the final wrapped Christmas presents, placing them under the tree. Smiles. Christmas lights not used to communicate, but just up for decoration. Then the crash. Gasping. Someone shouting. Phone Ringing. Sirens. Flashing red and blue lights.

El and Will were crying. Johnathan and Nancy were doing their best to comfort them. El was practically inconsolable. She had been right there when it happened. She couldn't stop it. Hell no one could. Cigarettes, stress, the lack of sleep for so long definitely didn't help. If there were regular checkups done maybe they could've picked up on the warning signs. But it's too little too late now.

A heart attack occurs when one or more of your coronary arteries become blocked. Over time, a coronary artery can narrow from the buildup of various substances, including but not limited to cholesterol. This condition known as coronary artery disease, causes most heart attacks.

First, discomfort or pain in the chest. Then nausea, lightheadedness, and vomiting. Thirdly comes jaw, neck, or back pain. Then pain in the left arm or shoulder. Finally comes shortness of breath. The five signs of a heart attack. Somehow no one noticed.

Suddenly the noises all came back. Doctors voices, the beeps of various machines, A heart monitor with a flatline. Someone counting compressions out loud as someone squeezes an ambu bag to keep oxygen flowing. This couldn't be real. This can't be happening. Everything was so perfect until it wasn't.

1 minute after his heart stopped, he lost consciousness.

She couldn't lose him. Losing Hopper would be the death of her. She needed him.

By 2 minutes CPR had been started by Johnathan.

She kept playing through the events in her mind.

By 5 minutes he was loaded into the ambulance and they were able to restart his heart.

Joyce wanted to be next to him. She wanted to hold him and be told everything would be okay. But she couldn't. She wasn't allowed in the room.

By 7 minutes his heart stopped again. CPR was started immediately.

She slid to the floor in the hall of Roane County Hospital sobbing. Johnathan and Nancy kept the kids at home for now.

By 10 minutes he had his own heartbeat.

Joyce watched from the window, waiting for him to wake. "Cmon baby please. Please hop" she cried and started to pray since she didn't know what to do.

The Brain is a very delicate organ. Brain cells started dying at the one minute mark. By three minutes neurons suffer more extensive damage, lasting brain damage becomes more likely. At five minutes death becomes imminent. At 10 minutes, even if the brain is still alive, a coma and lasting brain damage are inevitable. At 15 minutes survival becomes nearly impossible.

A doctor approached her "miss? You may see him now." She sprang up and rushed to his side. He was hooked up to all sorts of tubes and wiring. His heart monitor maintained a steady beat. Now just for him to wake.

"He had been injected with a clot-busting agent that restored blood flow to his heart. He wasn't without oxygen for that long due to the CPR administered. The Angiogram revealed a blockage and if he wakes we'll schedule the procedure. He'll need to stop smoking altogether and cut back on his smoking. He'll need to eat healthier

and for a few weeks at least keep his stress levels down. I'll prescribe two low dose aspirin a day for the course of two months, in which he'll need to come back in for a checkup then we'll reassess." The doctor handed her a prescription and a list of written instructions.

"Okay.. Y-you said if he wakes up?" She took mental notes of everything.

"Yes. Medically he's alright all things considered. He should wake up anytime now. But he's holding back. It happens sometimes. If people lose the will to fight.. they just slip away."

"C-can he hear me?" She rubs her hands over his one kissing it.

"We're not 100% sure. But we believe so." He smiles a little. "I'll be just outside if you need me."

She nodded as he walked out. "Hop.. baby.. I need you to wake up for me please. Please.." she let out a stifled sob. "If not for me for El. She's been through so much already. You're loved Hop. You're loved more than you can even imagine. You still have a purpose here. So please.. I'm begging you. Wake up. We can get better together. I-i can help you through recovery. I will help you wether you like it or not.." She half giggled half sobbed trying to stay as calm and collected as possible. She hoped he could hear. She wanted him to hear. She sat there holding his hand doing all she can do to help him.

She eventually cried herself to sleep. Exhausted from everything going on. The holidays, the new relationship, Hop's recent increase in nightmares about Sarah, and now this. Its taken its toll on Joyce, it hasn't all been bad. She loved the new relationship and how active it was and the holidays. They were finally together as a family.

What woke her up from her well needed nap wasn't Hop. It was a hand placed on her shoulder. She sleepily looked up at El who had come in. Her eyes were puffy and red and she looked terribly scared. "Mom.. is he gonna be okay?" She said glancing at her father laying unconscious in the bed.

She pulled her down into her lap and held her, hugging her tightly. "I I don't know honey. He's strong." El was silent. Unsure of how to find

the words to how she was feeling. She was terrified, her protector, her father laid in a hospital bed in-front of her. No one knew what was going to happen or if he was going to be okay and she hated it.



## 10. Chapter 10

It was Christmas morning. Joyce woke to the sounds of voices and a noticeable lack of weight on her lap. She sat up in a daze but quickly snapped out of it when a large hand took hers.

"Hop?!" She rubbed her eyes which soon filled with happy, grateful tears as a bright blue eyed hop smiled back at her. El was sitting on the bed next to him clinging as tightly as she could. He had an arm around her rubbing her back.

"Don't cry Joy. I'm here. I heard.." he smiled and pat the other side of the tiny bed motioning for her to climb up.

Joyce quickly took the opportunity. "When are you going in for the procedure..?" She looked him over and checked the heart monitor making sure it was still beating.

"I already did.." he chuckled slightly.

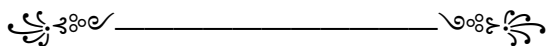
"What? When?" She looked confused. "How long was I asleep for? And how long have you been awake for?"

"I've been up for about four hours now. I had the procedure done. Just a small cut." He smiled and rubbed her side.

"You only just woke me up now?! Why didn't you wake me Hop?" She looked slightly hurt but it quickly went away as she felt him kiss the top of her forehead. Grateful that he was alive.

"El wanted to wake you but I knew you were exhausted so I told her not to. You needed your sleep. I'm allowed to go home soon" he smiled widely.

"Okay.. thank you Hop" Joyce couldn't help but smile. "And El." El smiled too.



A few hours passed and Joyce was helping Hop into her pinto. By then Will and Jonathan had swung by to check in on him.

"Hop there will be some changes" Joyce gives him a look as he reached for the pack of camels in the front seat. "Starting with no smoking."

He sighed getting slightly angry "come on! Just one?"

Before Joyce could grab the pack el flung it out the open window with a smirk.

"Damn it! El!" He sighed but then chuckled a little.

"Not one Hop, I'll quit too. I can't lose you to another fucking heart attack okay?" She was serious. She didn't find it funny. "But for now let's just go home and enjoy being a family. Please."

Hop nodded deciding not to push the subject yet. He took her hand and napped the slow ride home. It had snowed heavily that night so the roads were pretty icy.

Once home he got settled with Joyce on the couch and watched the kids open gifts. El loving the cooler filled with boxes of eggos, and her own supercom. Will got new crayons and artist grade colored pencils, and a few other odds and ends. Jonathan got new photography stuff, including a new video camera.

Joyce grabbed a box and passed it to hop. "I know we agreed on not getting each other gifts but I found this going through some old boxes of mine.. I figured you'd want it back after all these years. I don't know how I ended up with it but I did."

He looked puzzled but took it and opened it up. A wide grin formed across his face and he let out a huge whole-hearted laugh. "I can't believe you found this! I always wondered what happened to it." Out he pulled a Class ring that read 'Hawkins High Class of 65' with his initials engraved on the inside.

"I think you gave it to me at one point. Before well..." she sighed "that's not important. I just thought it was kinda cool that I found it and was able to return it" she kissed his cheek "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas to you too. So. Let me get up and get yours." He motioned to get up but she wouldn't let him.

"It can wait. Right now I just want to be here with you. Please.." her voice got soft.

He met her soft tone with a soft smile. "Okay." A honk broke the moment. El and Will stood. Jonathan grabbed their coats. Mrs Wheeler, after hearing about what happened agreed to take the kids for the day before their annual evening Christmas dinner party. Jonathan was going to come along in a separate car.

After the kids and Jonathan left Joyce moved closer to him. "We don't have to go to that dinner party tonight if you're not up for it." By now word had spread of them being together and she didn't really care. He had never gone in previous years and she wasn't sure if he wanted to go now.

"Please. And me miss you wearing that dress you wouldn't show me after you bought it cause it was a surprise for this? Not for the world. We're going." He chuckled. "But we have a few hours to relax before then don't we?"

"Yes that we do." She smiled and cuddled up closer.

"Joyce did the doctor say anything about me not being able to.. have sex?" He cleared his throat nervously.

"Yes actually." His heart dropped. "He didn't say you couldn't. He explained that it was common for both of us to be nervous about it.. so he explained that if you can walk up and down two flights of stairs without feeling any symptoms then you're healthy enough for it. He said you should try to resume a normal life. Just no smoking." She smiled and kissed him.

"Can I walk up and down the basement steps a couple times to see? And so I can get you your gift."

She chuckled giving him a look. "If you feel you're up for it then sure."

"I'm sorry I can't help it. I just.." he blushed.

"Don't apologize" she giggled. "You're so cute when you're embarrassed" she moved so he could move off the couch. He handed

her a box and went off to walk down the stairs. Out she pulled a skimpy Lacey nightgown. "HOP!" She called laughing as she heard him walk down the stairs and back up a few times.

"Guess what! No symptoms!" He called to her sticking his head around the corner to where he could see her with a goofy grin.

It just made her really laugh.

## 11. Chapter 11

"Hop what if your parents don't like me. I was never sure they liked me in High School." Joyce sighed, checking herself in a mirror again. Hair? Check. Makeup? Check. Decent clothes? Check. Jewelry? Check.

Hop broke her mental checklist. "You look great Babe, they'll like you." He kissed the back of her neck while putting a coat over her shoulders.

It was mid January by now, Johnathan and Nancy were watching the kids so Joyce could go with Hopper to finally meet his parents again. They had already met El and loved her.

Her stomach churned. She knew this was coming so she just chalked it up as her worrying about that. It was worse this time. But Hopper was so excited. He set everything up, the plane tickets. Their outings with the parents. Everything. She had never flown before either, which scared her. She made whatever excuses she can to explain off feeling sick.

"Ready babe? I finished loading the car." He broke her train of thought and looked quizzically at her. "You alright?"

"Oh yeah! Let's go. I'm fine. Just nervous" she chuckled. Taking a glance at the calendar before following him out. Once settled on the plane she took his hand and snuggled. Forgetting all about feeling sick earlier.

The flight took only about an hour and a half. But for her first time that felt like an eternity. "Where are we going first? The hotel.. or wherever were staying or the restaurant?"

"We're staying in their guest room. And we'll drop off bags there then go to the restaurant, where we'll be meeting them" he said again. She kept asking him throughout the flight. He wasn't mad, it's how she distracted herself from her nerves and anxiety.

"Okay. Then tomorrow exploring the city? It seems so huge.." she

looked around in awe.

"Yeah it's huge. Compared to our tiny little town. You may never see the same stranger twice." He chuckled

"That actually seems nice for a change." She smiled. He hailed a cab and gave the address of their townhouse. Traffic was bad so they made small talk. "Wait what is the date?" She couldn't help but think about how she was forgetting something.

"January 13th." He looked at her not thinking much of it.

"Okay." She smiled nothing clicking yet. "Their house is gorgeous!" She admired it as she grabbed her bag from the trunk.

"Yeah. I've always liked it. I'll carry your bag." He ignored her protests and carried it into the house. "Now cmon. You look great. You're working yourself up for nothing. We're gonna be late if we don't go now" he chuckled.

"Just great?" She whined jokingly getting into the car.

"Beautiful" he kissed her reassuringly. He always seemed to have the answer to everything.

The taxi ride was long. But Joyce didn't mind. It was dark now and the city was lit up. She got lost watching the lights, completely ignoring anything hop said.

"Joyce? ..Joyce?" He shook her arm snapping her out of her trance "We're here.. you okay?" He looked concerned.

"Oh yeah I'm fine. Let's go" she smiled and got out. What am I forgetting? It started to really bother her. Not knowing what it was that she needed to remember. It didn't matter now so she just pushed it to the far corner of her mind and focused on the task at hand.

He lead her inside to where they were greeted by his parents. "Jim!" His mom hugged him. "It's been too long! So. This must be Joyce?" She said with a warm smile.

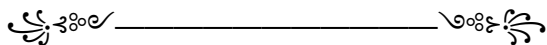
"Yes, hello, very nice to meet you" she hugged his mom and shook his

fathers hand. "Shall we?"

His mother nodded and sat down across from her. "We haven't seen you in years. How have you been!"

"I've been good. I have two boys now." She grinned and took out a picture of them.

Dinner went well. It was a lot of small talk and catching up. After a while the four loaded into a taxi and came home. She was exhausted. As soon as she laid down next to him she was out like a light.



Joyce slept in the next morning. Feeling the now typical sensation of feeling ill. It was worse this time though. She hurried to the closest bathroom and threw up. She almost instantly felt better so she brushed it off again as some odd occurrence. Hoping that Hop didn't see or hear she cleaned herself up, brushing her teeth, and grabbing a breath mint. She opened the bathroom door to find hop leaning up against the doorframe of the room across way.

"You okay?" He asked having seen her make her little escape.

"Oh yeah I'm- I'm fine" she chuckled. "Just had to pee." She kissed him. Busted.

"You sure? I saw you.. what's going on? We don't have to go out if you're sick." He felt her head. "No fever"

"I. Idk I feel fine now but it's been like that for about a week. I just think it's stress or anxiety related. Idk. I'm fine now." She hugged him.

"Is it the same time every day?"

"Yeah, roughly.. why?" She looked confused.

"Well you keep asking about the date so.." he shrugged. He wasn't quite sure where he was going with it.

Her nose scrunched as she laughed "okay then" it got her thinking

again. "Is breakfast ready yet?"

"No not yet. I'll go check?" He smiled and kissed her before walking downstairs.

She hurried to her purse and grabbed her small pocket calendar flipping to the date. Scanning over the past few weeks. It hit her. "Crap." She sighed rubbing her temples. "Crap." She repeated putting the planner back into her purse plopping down on the bed.

"Crap?" A very confused hopper stood in the doorway. "What's wrong?"

She thought fast. "I uh.. need to know where the nearest Kmart is.."

He was even more confused now. "There's one a few blocks over.. I can take you.. why?"

"Oh no no I can take myself. I just forgot my feminine products.." she blushed.

"Oh okay.. I'll give you the address. You've got cash for a cab right?"

"Yes. Thank you" She kisses him changing quickly into something more comfortable. She then put on the Hawkins police coat he had given her months ago and left without eating. Her mind raced through all the what if possibilities the whole way there. She had to find out if her suspicions were correct.



## 12. Chapter 12

He couldn't shake the feeling that there was something she wasn't telling him. The trip to New York City was fairly uneventful. It went great, actually. But things felt different with her. Maybe he overwhelmed her by reintroducing them too quickly. Maybe he said something, maybe he did something. It was eating at him, but he wanted her to tell him. He was afraid if he pushed she'd retreat back farther away from him.

It was nearing Valentine's Day now and she had everything planned out for his gift. He on the other hand was too preoccupied to even realize how close to Valentine's Day it was. Meaning he had nothing planned. She broke his train of thought by climbing into his lap kissing him.

"When do you have to be in at work?" She said semi sleepily.

"The kids have to be up in an hour.. I have to be in right after that so I should get ready soon. What about you?"

"Damn.. I go in at 9." She pouted and kissed him again. Nipping at his lower lip.

His growl turned into a sigh. "I need to take a shower and get ready-"

"I can shower with you" she smirked "that way we can kill two birds with one stone.." she kissed him again. Slipping off her pj top. Shimmying up so her hips hovered over his bulge.

"We'll have to be quick and quiet" he manages to say before picking her up and kissing her deeply as he carried her to the bathroom. He locked the door behind them and put her down so he can undress himself. She does the same. He led her into the shower and turned on the water. Wasting no time he scooped her up immediately and slid in fully. She dug her nails into the back of his neck, her moans muffled by his kisses.

She rocked her hips, matching his thrusts perfectly. "Fuck hop!" She arched her back. He moved his kisses down her neck, sucking a big

purple mark just on the base of her neck. "Faster hop! Before they wake.." she moaned out.

Challenge accepted. He sped up, using the wall for support. He kissed her just as her first wave hit.

She moaned into his kiss. Her whole body tightening and shaking. His thrusts became uneven and sporadic. He stayed with her and came down just as she did.

Just in time too. About 5 minutes after they had finished and had started actually showering there was a knock on the bathroom door. "Mom?" Will asked.

"Yeah?" She said.

"I need to pee but it's locked. How much longer will you be?"

"I'm almost done sweetie." She chuckled. "What do you want for breakfast?" She asked as she applied soap to what she could reach of hopper's back.

"I'm thinking pancakes." Hop interjects.

"... hop..? Is that you?" Will just realized they're in there together. "Uhm I'll just talk when you get out." He hurried down the hall giggling. He ran right into Jonathan with this awkward look on his face.

"What's wrong bud?" He looked concerned.

"Mom and Hop are in the shower together" Will looked uncomfortable.

Jonathan didn't like it one bit. He scurried off down the hall and pounded on the door angrily. "MOM!" He shouted.

The sudden pounding startled both of them. Joyce nearly slipped but quickly got out grabbing a towel wrapping one around herself then passing one to Hop. She hurried out dripping wet unclothed "Jonathan what's wrong?!" She looked around half expecting a demogorgon or a fire. Nancy had woken too.

"THIS! Is what's wrong. You and him in the shower together! Wills mortified! I hate it. He's not good for you! He's just another dead-beat drunk. You don't want that." He lowered his voice "he can't keep his daughter alive. Let alone himself. Why would you want that?"

Hop heard, it killed him. He cleared his throat and walked to the back room tearing up.

Joyce was in disbelief. "I can't believe you. I've never been more disappointed in you Jonathan! I can't fucking believe you." She was practically speechless.

Nancy pulled Jonathan away. "That was not cool. At all. She's so happy with him. Why would you try to ruin it for her?" She shook her head.

Joyce hurried to find hop. "Hop look at me it's no-" she said while dressing herself.

He was all dressed and ready for work "It's all true Joyce. I'm not good for you. I don't fit in here. I'll head back to my place after work. And El can stay here if she wants.

"No hop please.." She was on the verge of full on crying. "Hop don't leave me. Please." She climbed closer to him and kissed him.

He pushed her away and stood "I'm sorry Joyce. I don't want to hurt you." He wiped his eyes. "I love you. But I just want what's best for you and that's not me.." he grabbed his hat and keys and walked out saying nothing more.

She tried to stop him. "Hop! Please!" She started to cry fully now. He got in his truck not bothering to turn back and drove off. She slid to the ground sobbing.

All eyes were on Jonathan that morning. "Look what you did!" Nancy hissed at a loud whisper. "So you much prefer your mom to be like that rather than be happy?"

Will slowly approached her. "Mom?" He sits down next to her and hugs her. Sobs rocked her small body.

Jonathan sighed. "He walked out not me!"

"Oh don't give me that crap! You brought up his daughter. She died of cancer. He tried Jonathan!" Nancy was furious. "Cmon kids. We're going to school. Then me and you are going to go talk to him." She said while she pointed at Jonathan. Will and El sighed. Jonathan nodded and followed her into her car.

Joyce wanted to drink but she couldn't. She just sat there and cried until she fell asleep. Her little body easily swallowed up by the long empty hallway.

## 13. Chapter 13

Hop walked straight past Flo. He ignored everyone. This sent up obvious red flags in Flo's book but she's learned by now that it's best not to question it. It wasn't until she heard him crying in his office that she decided to approach him.

"Chief?" She knocked softly.

Hop wiped his face and sniffled. He tried his hardest to hide his puffy red eyes but he couldn't. He let her in. "Yeah Flo?" He forced a smile.

"Hop what's the matter? Are you okay?" The concerned look could be read all over her.

Something woke Joyce up and made her realize she was going to be late for work if she didn't hurry. "Shit" she stood up, quickly threw on her work uniform, and ran out the door. She managed to make it on time but would've much rather not have come in at all.

Hop shook his head no in response to Flo's second question. "I screwed up."

She shut the door and sat down across from him ready to listen with an open mind.

He explained what had happened. He omitted the more personal details but gave her the overall gist.

Flo sighed. "Well, the good news is. She loves you. So if you go back to her, apologize for being stupid. It's a near guarantee that she'll take you back. Also make sure to get her something extra nice for Valentine's Day after you make it up to her."

"Shit when is Valentine's Day?" He sighed clearly having forgotten.

"This Saturday"

"Damn it. Okay I'll figure that out later.. thank you Flo. She should be in at work soon so I'll swing over." He smiled a little. She gave him a supportive hug before she walked out. "I'll give you ideas for her later

hop!" She shouted back.

It had been a pretty slow morning. Up until Lonnie showed up. He was either very strung out or drunk. Or some combination of both. He was irate.

"Joyce honey you get that sweet ass of yours over here. Now." He demanded as he realized she was the employee on duty.

"No." She said shakily.

He hated being told no. So he destroyed a display. He used one of the iron rods from the display as his weapon. He smashed a few glass bottles walking towards her.

Flo got a call from Donald about the events occurring in Melvald's. She promptly informed hop of the situation and before she could finish he was out the door. He threw his blazer in reverse and flew across town as quickly as possible. His sirens blared as he pulled in and threw it in park. His heart raced terrified of what he would find, just solely based on the appearance of the store.

Joyce was backed into a corner. Shielding herself as best she could. Her back was towards him and she kept her knees to her chest. She was crying.

Hopper approached him with his gun drawn. "Lonnie. Put it down. Take a step back with your hands above your head."

"Ooh big bad cop. I'm soooo scared" he teased. He didn't budge. Hop inched closer. Steve was the second officer to arrive. He approached from the side as Hop approached from behind.

"Joyce babe, do you think you can get outside now that he's backed away a bit?" Hop asked, really just wanting her out of there so if anything happened to him in the takedown she wouldn't have to see.

Before Joyce could respond Lonnie spun around flipping out. "What did you just call my wife?! She needs me, not some lowlife big city cop wannabe!" He was fuming.

"I am not your wife Lonnie! I hate you. I hate ever being with you!"

The only good that came from it was my boys!" She said as she slipped past them to the other side of the store. She gave Hop a please be careful look. Lonnie was distracted. Steve saw his opportunity and took it. He tackled and cuffed him.

"You're dead!" He screamed. "Let me go! You're dead!"

"Got this?" Hop asked Steve, who promptly nodded and manhandled Lonnie to his squad car. He then proceeded to slowly walk up to a shaking Joyce, with his head hung low. "I-I-" he started to say something but stopped. Hop searched for the right words but nothing came.

She didn't care at that moment. Joyce hurried around the counter and wrapped her arms around him crying. She didn't say anything either. She didn't need to. He knew how she felt.

Hop wrapped his arms around her. He held her in the middle of the store till her sobs subsided. He kissed and wiped her tears. "We should talk."

"Yeah we should.. but I have to clean this up.." She shakily grabbed a broom and a dustpan. She was hurt, her hormones all over the place, Lonnie both scared her and made her mad. She didn't want to talk right now.

Donald interjected. "Joyce you don't have to stay to clean this. I can do it."

Hop went to open his mouth. But instead he grabbed a second broom and dustpan. She stopped him.

"I don't need your help hop!" She snapped. He tensed up and stayed quiet. Hop promptly put away the broom and exited the store silently.

"Damn it!" She sighed as she started to cry. Donald put a hand on her shoulder. "Go home. I've got this." It wasn't an option at this point. She put the broom down and went to her car. Before long she found herself sitting in Hop's office, hoping and praying he'll come in. It took everything she had not to have a smoke. She had quit with Hop.

An hour passed. Nothing. Flo radioed him again. She regretted pushing him away. She should've talked.

A second hour passed. Footsteps approached but they didn't seem like Hop's. They were too light. Flo opened the door and gave Joyce a look, before she motioned a blonde to another seat in his office. Joyce looked at her taking note of how familiar she seemed.

Flo radioed Hop again. "Hop. I think you should stop sulking around and come in. Joyce and Diane are in your office looking for you."



## 14. Chapter 14

### Notes for the Chapter:

Comments are greatly appreciated! I hope you guys are enjoying it so far. Let me know what you do and don't like!

"Shit. Alright I'll be right in" Hop finally radioed back. He pulled in not long after. Meanwhile the two ladies, one oblivious to the others affiliations got introduced.

"Hi I'm Diane, what about you?" She said with a smile.

"Joyce, What brings you here?" Her guard was up.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking lately. I miss him. I'm his ex wife, I know at one point he still had feelings for me so I was going to see if he still does cause I made a huge mistake.. is he seeing anyone currently?"

Joyce's heart sunk. "Right now? No. He's not." It was true. They weren't together at that moment. He had walked out.

"Oh perfect!" She said cheerfully.

Joyce was grabbing her things when he walked in. He exchanged quick glances between them both. "Joyce sit down please. We need to talk. Diane what do you want?" He had a bouquet of roses with him, which was what he was doing that took him so long to get there.

"Are those for me?!" Diane grinned.

"No.. they're for Joyce." He shot Joyce an embarrassed apologetic look.

Joyce couldn't help but smile at the mixture of white and red roses.

"Oh..." Diane slowly started to realize what was going on. "Well I came here looking to see if you were interested in getting back together.."

Hop wasn't expecting that. "Why? Why now?"

"Because I'm stupid okay? I never should've let you go. I love you Jim." She was tearing up. "I'm moving here Jim"

"Well I'm sorry Diane but I'm not interested..." he says glancing at Joyce.

"Think about it please. I uh..." she got up and briskly walked out with her head down.

"Joyce I'm sorry. I love you not her. I couldn't decide on what to get you flower wise. I know your favorites are sunflowers but it's February." He rubbed the back of his neck.

"They're perfect." She kissed him. "I forgive you. So that's Diane huh?" She smirked slightly.

"Yeah.. she's always been like that.. I can't believe she's moving out here." He's lost pretty deep in thought. "I don't think that that's a good idea cause we'll she won't give up. I'm just worried about you."

"Don't be I'll be okay" she smiled and kissed him. "We need to talk to Jonathan."

"Yeah... that we do.." he sighed. "Will you be okay to go home alone or do you want to stay here?"

"I can go. I'm fine. I could use a nap anyway. He's locked up right?"

"Yeah. He will be. For a bit." He smiled. "Call if you need anything please."

She kissed him before she left. She really wasn't okay. But she didn't want him to worry so she opted not to tell him. She barely made it to the door before she broke down.

She turned on the radio. Looking for whatever can distract her. She heard this

"He said 'I'll love you till I die' she told him 'you'll forget in time' As the years went slowly by, she still preyed upon his mind.

He kept her picture on his wall.. when half crazy now and then. Well he still loved her through it all. Hoping she'd come back again.."

She had to turn it off. She couldn't think about that. It hit too close to home for her. She wanted to run. She wanted to escape. She let out a sigh before she headed to Jonathan's room and knocked.

"Yeah?" He asked opening the door. "Oh h-hi mom."

She crossed her arms. "We need to talk. Now."

"Yes mom" he walked to the couch and sat down.

"How dare you? What happened to my boy? Cause you certainly aren't him. I'm so disappointed in you." She sighed

"I'm sorry mom.. I just. I don't want him to hurt you. I've heard his previous women talk.. he has a habit of getting their hopes up and then bolting. I'm just trying to protect you." He looked down.

"I'm different than all those other girls Jonathan! He actually loves me. Hell he just turned down his ex wife for me." She placed the flowers into a vase.

"His ex wife is here? Why is she here?" He looked up at her.

"She wanted him back. She bought a place here. I I don't know why? I'm not her." She sighed angrily. "Jonathan stop deflecting."

"I'm not deflecting mom! Isn't that a little unusual that she would just magically show up and move here, just as things between you two got rough. That seems pretty unusual to me. What are the odds that it was purely just a coincidence?" He hugged her. "I'm just trying to protect you mom. I really don't want you to be hurt again."

She sniffled. Contemplating whether or not what he said made sense. She started to cry again. "Damn it!" She cried out. Their conversation got interrupted by her bolting off to the bathroom again. He heard her throw up.

"Mom..? Are you okay?" He knocked softly.

"Yeah I'm fine" she sighed and brushed her teeth. "It's just from stress"

"You sure mom? I've never seen stress make you sick like that before.." he was suspicious.

"Yes im sure. Now just drop it okay? Stop avoiding the problem at hand."

"Mom I just want to make sure you're okay! If he's causing you that much stress why are you with him"

"It's complicated! And it's more you than him!" She sighed. "I really don't think he called his wife here."

"You don't know that!"

"Why would he call his wife here?! He was just upset!" She shouted.  
"All because of you!"

"Not because of me mom! Because of his problems! They're things he should take care of before he puts them on you!"

"He needs help! Why is that not something I can do?!"

"Because you've been through enough mom! You don't need another burden."

"My only other burden right now is you! You can't seem to let me be happy! You hated Bob. You hate Hop! What the hell do you want?!"

He stormed off and slammed his door. She didn't bother to follow.

## 15. Chapter 15

Hop's suspicion had grown. She was avoiding telling him something, but god only knows what it is. Valentine's Day had come and went. She was sick so none of their plans ended up happening.

She had planned on telling him on Valentine's Day but since she was sick she couldn't, so she had time to psychoanalyze it and she ended up psyching herself out of it.

Hop couldn't take it. He leaned on her doorframe quietly till she noticed.

She looked up from her spot on the bed putting down the socks she was about to put on. "Hey" she smirked. "I thought you left for work already" she hurried over to kiss him.

He stopped her. "What's going on Joy?"

Her smile faded. "What do you mean..?" She looked puzzled.

"Tell me what I did wrong. You've been avoiding telling me something... and acting weirdly." He gently stroked her cheek.

"I'm fine baby. It's nothing." She kissed him.

This only made him angrier. "Damn it Joyce!" He hit the door in frustration. "What aren't you telling me?!"

She jumped, fear flooded her thoughts. Tears started to stream down her face. "It's. Nothing." She said firmly. "Why don't you just go to work. Aren't you late?"

His heart melted seeing her start to cry. He knew it was his fault. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have yelled.." he hugged her.

"Please just.. leave me alone." She wasn't in the mood. She had to work and if she continued this conversation she'd spend the whole day pissed.

"What?" He wasn't expecting her to say that.

She walked past him grabbing her coat. Her silence filled the room. He didn't follow her. He respected her wishes and continued to get ready for work.

She pulled in at Melvald's a short while later. As usual the regulars came and went. She just went through the motions. Customer after customer. Same smile, same sentence, same politeness. That routine soon broke. A familiar face with his goofy smile stared back at her. She couldn't help but grin. She was mad but that didn't change how she feels about him.

He was kissing up to her. He knew he made a mistake. "I brought lunch.. and your favorite wine." He grinned.

"I'll take my lunch break but. I can't drink" she giggled.

"You don't have to get drunk. If that's what you're worried about. Just a glass won't hurt. It's your favorite." He insisted. He took her hand while she led him to the break room. It was too cold to eat outside.

"I know babe. I mean I can't.." she repeated herself as she sat down taking a sandwich.

His brows furrowed and he looked confused. "What do you mean?"

"I have been avoiding telling you something. Frankly it's cause I'm scared." She admitted looking down. She went to take a bite but stopped.

"You can tell me anything." He took her hand and rubbed it. "Don't be scared. You can't and won't scare me off" he was terrified. A thousand things raced through his mind. Cancer? sick? leaving? All the times he saw her run off to the bathroom or refuse to eat something flooded into his mind. She was tired often, cranky.

"Okay" she smiled widely. "I'm pregnant." It was late in the game for her for sure but it was happening. She nervously waited for his reaction.

His worry vanished. He wasn't expecting that but he was more than thrilled. "Oh my god. T-that's great!" He gleamed. He was so proud, words couldn't describe how he felt. He gently placed his hand on her

stomach. "How far along?"

She grinned and leaned on him, finally feeling like she can relax. "12 weeks, so end of first trimester"

"Oh my god" he couldn't stop grinning. He soon became worried and she picked right up on it.

"They're healthy. I'll bring you to the next appointment. I just had one yesterday. Too early for gender but it's very healthy" she rubbed his hand. "I have to tell the boys and el still.. how do you think she's going to react?"

"Oh I don't know.. I think we're gonna have to explain where baby's come from while we're at it.." he chuckled slightly dreading that talk.

"Oh that's gonna be all on you" She giggled and patted his shoulder. "I have to get back to work though." She kissed his cheek and he frowned a bit.

"But a few more minutes?" He pleaded.

"I'm sorry babe. But I have to get back." She went back out front.

Hop didn't leave however. He wandered around the store picking up random objects and every few customers he'd get on line and buy one thing. It made her smile widely when she caught on what he was doing.

"Hop I'm gonna get in trouble!" She giggled.

"Why? I'm a paying customer. I forgot my list so I'll remember I needed something else after." He laughed.

"You need this?" She gives him a look.

"Well yeah. Why what is it?" He had just grabbed something random.

"It's for women to keep down there fresh.." She couldn't stop giggling, she didn't know why, it's not that weird of a thing. Just seeing the look on his face did it for her.

He looked down and realized what he was purchasing. His face turned a new shade of red as he received a look from little old Mrs. Shefton, their former English teacher from high school.

That only made Joyce giggle-snort more. She had just moved back to Hawkins so this was the first time Joyce had seen her. Mrs Shefton had always been one of those fairly friendly teachers who was in the know. She helped Hop pass english throughout high school, and had always felt there was something more than it seemed between Joyce and him. Hop promptly took it back and grabbed something else. Joyce had come around to hug her.

"Hello sweetie! So you and Hop finally got your act together?" She grinned widely.

"That we did, finally." She grinned and turned around to look at him as he stood at the counter, hat on and all, and waited with a genuine trouble-maker, goofy grin. Her perfect, goofy, loveable, damaged Hopper. She couldn't be happier.



## 16. Chapter 16

"Damn it! Come on!" Joyce shouted as her olive green pinto broke down on the side of the empty highway just as it was starting to rain. She got out and opted to walk back to nearby Jonesboro. She was a ways away from Jonesboro and had quite the walk, but she thought it was better than sitting and hoping for a car to pass. Looking back on it later, boy was she glad she did. Little did she know that while she was walking back, a drunk driver crashed into the pinto and totaled her car.

Hopper received the call of a bad wreck on the 45. He didn't think too much of it up until the report that the totaled car was a green pinto. His heart sank. He tightened up and a million thoughts raced through his mind. He couldn't lose both of them. Not now. Not as everything's going so good. He pulled up just as the first ambulance arrived. Phil arrived as backup to close off the road. He ran to her pinto, with every bone of his body dreading what he'd see. He was excited for a moment not to see her inside it. But then the next question raced through his mind. Where is she? Could she have been ejected. She doesn't always wear her seat belt. He started to look around in the grass. "Joyce?!" He called repeatedly. Once entirely sure she wasn't there he raced back to his blazer to find her. "Phil I need you to handle this."

"Yes Chief" he replied and let him go.

Hopper ran to his blazer and sped off down the road towards Jonesboro. It was raining heavily now. Damn it Joyce where are you? He kept scanning. Nothing. He made it to Jonesboro and pulled into town square. Throwing the blazer into park. He took a second to breathe. He hit the steering wheel in frustration "Shit!" A shaky sigh was released as a tear slipped out. The moment got interrupted by a tap on his window.

"Hop? What's wrong? I didn't even call for a ride yet.. how did you know I was here?" A very confused and soaked Joyce stood outside his blazer.

He hopped out of his truck and hugged her. "Your car-- I thought you

were seriously hurt. Y-you're okay?" he looked at her quizzically.

She chuckled slightly "yeah it broke down so I walked back here.. why what happened?" by now she knew all his expressions. So when he appeared to be withholding something, she picked right up on it.

"Some guy he-he hit it... it's totaled" he sighed and started to calm down, knowing that she was alright.

"What?! No! Damn it! I need that.." she took a deep breath and tried not to cry. She couldn't afford a new car, all her savings were used to pay Jonathan's tuition.

"Joyce we can get you a new car. That's not important. What's important is that you're okay, that you're both okay." He held her closely.

"C-can we go inside? I'm freezing. I could use a cup of coffee." She insisted.

"Yes of course" he said while wrapping his coat around her and ushering her towards the nearby diner.

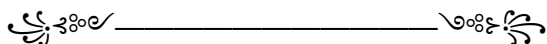
She sighed and sat. "What if.. what if this-- us is a mistake? What if.." She couldn't believe she was saying this just as everything was finally going great.

He stopped fidgeting immediately and locked eyes with her "W-what?"

"I don't know.. it was a stupid question I'm sorry.. I guess I'm just terrified honestly." She looked down.

He took her hands. "It's okay to be afraid. I am too. This is the first time everything's actually okay since before well it all wasn't. We're both waiting for it to go south but we shouldn't. You're not living if you're just living in fear, expecting the worst. I won't hurt you Joyce, I won't leave you. I'm not going to give up on us without a fight. I love you and it kills me that Lonnie hurt you so badly that you're afraid to love." He slowly swirled his thumbs across the back of her hands. He turned them over and rubbed her palms next. This small action had her entranced. She couldn't understand how such a small

action, could make her feel so relieved, so reassured. But it did. It left her feeling safe. She smiled and to Hopper's relief, broke the silence with a nod and a quiet "okay."



Hopper soon pulled back into the Byers' residence and put the Blazer in park. He smiled and turned to her, no one wanted to move. It was so perfect, why ruin that? That moment didn't last long, the silence broken by Jonathan.

Jonathan came bolting out of the house at the sight of the truck parked in the driveway. "Mom!? What happened? Your car!" He frantically hugged her, taking a glance or two at Hopper as if to say an unspoken 'thank you' for her safe return.

She leaned into the hug before pulling away to explain. "I'm fine! I promise. The car broke down, so I walked back, then it got hit.. I may need to borrow your car until I get a new one. If that's alright.." She sheepishly chuckled, while tugging at loose seam strings on her sleeve. Frankly she was stressed beyond belief. She didn't know how she was going to afford a new car.

"Of course Mom." he nodded. "You need it more than me." Just as any 18 year old, they don't like to lose their mode of transportation, which is his freedom basically. But he agreed that it was necessary. She was in fact, paying for his tuition when he returns to NYU. He had opted to take the semester off, more or less to watch over Hopper and make sure he wasn't going to hurt her like Lonnie did so many times before. Jonathan still didn't like the pairing but what teenage boy likes anything their parents do. He's realizing more and more that he is not going to hurt her like so many have before. That he is going to stick around through the thick and the thin. Hopper is everything Joyce needs, and Joyce is everything Hopper needs, whether either of them realize it or not.

## 17. Chapter 17

"H-hop!" She moaned into his kiss as she rose to her high. His thrusts grew shaky and uneven as she tightened around him. Her nails dug into his back, knuckles turning a shade of white.

"Fuck!" He growled as he came deep inside her. He flopped down onto the bed next to her and pulled her closer as they both caught their breath.

It had been about a month since she lost her car. She was still using Jonathan's as she's had no luck finding the perfect car. Who knew that a small town wouldn't have many options? Hop did. But she refused to listen and add what she deemed unnecessary miles onto either of their cars. She won't admit it, but she's slowly realizing she should go out and look elsewhere. She just needs something affordable that runs.

Her baby bump has just barely started to show. As it grew, Hop's tough guy appearance has since completely melted away when it comes to him and that baby. She often jokes to him about who the woman is in the relationship. Even though she jokes about it a lot she absolutely loves the attention he gives her and the baby bump. He's always rubbing, kissing, or talking to it and it's absolutely adorable. She's due to go in for a possible gender revealing ultrasound, but Joyce is very unsure about if she wants to know. Hop on the other hand wants to know so he can create the nursery and surprise her. Hop's trying to convince her to meet halfway— to compromise, or Halfway happy as El would put it— and have the doctor tell only him. This would keep Joyce in the dark and then allow for him to act out his plan for the nursery. He's already got Will and El on board to help by distracting Joyce while he works on it.

They got around to telling the boys first and then El. Who thankfully took it very well. So much better than they ever had expected. They were nervous she wouldn't accept the change but as soon as she understood it fully, she's insisted on carrying around and caring for a baby doll that makes noise, needs to be fed a water filled bottle, and changed. So in her words 'she can be prepared to help mom out when the baby comes'. It was absolutely adorable. Joyce has tried her best

to fully explain how it's gonna work, and what it'll be like, having a new baby and all. El said she understood but Joyce wasn't so sure.

It was one of the last things on her mind currently as she laid there catching her breath. All her focus turned to the frantic knock on her door. She turned to hop who gave her a confused look back. It was around 1 am, and none of the kids should be up. Hop threw on a pair of pants and walked to the door. He opened it up to find a very sad El standing there, holding her baby doll who she affectionately has since named Mike jr.

"Honey what's wrong?" Hop asked bending down so he was eye level with her. "Are you hurt?"

"No.. Mike Jr doesn't cry anymore" she sniffled. "Why doesn't he cry anymore daddy?"

"Oh.. let me see." He took Mike Jr from her, a little more roughly than she would've liked.

"Gentle daddy.. don't hurt him." She helped support his head just like Joyce had said.

Hop soon figured out that his batteries had died. "He needs new batteries honey. I can get some in the morning? It's late." He rubbed his brow.

"No!" She started to cry again. "I need him fixed now!" She whimpered. It was clear that if he didn't fix it, she wasn't going to bed anytime soon. He led her into the kitchen and grabbed a screwdriver and batteries. She placed Mike Jr onto the table and allowed him to replace his batteries. The look on her face made it seem as if he was actually saving the life of her child. She hugged him as soon as Mike Jr started to cry again. "Thank you daddy!"

"You're welcome! Now bed time. What are you doing up anyway?" He crossed his arms. "It's a school night."

"I know.. mike wanted to watch a movie." She said guiltily.

"Mikes here?" He crossed his arms, he didn't have a problem with it, he would've much rather been asked first though. His protective

fatherly instincts were kicking in even though Mike's afraid of him.

"Yeah.. I'm sorry daddy I should've asked first.." she looked down as tears flooded back to her eyes.

"It's okay., next time just ask? Go on. You two go to bed though. It's late." He placed a hand on her back between her shoulders and ushered her towards her room. He stuck his head in. "Hi Mike, you two go to bed"

"Hi Hop.. okay" Mike nodded half expecting to be yelled at rather than the brief interaction he received. El placed Mike Jr into the little bassinet she had gotten for him and got into bed next to him. Mike curled around her and got comfy.

Once satisfied that they were going to bed he moseyed his way back to bed himself. Yawning frequently on the way back. Joyce was sound asleep again. Hop didn't want to wake her, so he carefully got back in bed curling up next to her. She in her sleep state slid herself back and cuddled up into him, snuggling for his warmth and comfort. He soon joined her in a much needed deep sleep. Before long the whole house fell to an almost eerie silent. Comparable to the peaceful, serene silence of a cemetery. Nothing moved, except for the beams of light that shone through the curtains from the moon above. A stillness that could rattle even the strongest of people and a silence that could deafen most.

## 18. Chapter 18

There's something eerily serene about the atmosphere of a cemetery. Something about the silence, the stillness, the blanket of fog that covers the motionless headstones. Some are weathered others are decorated with varying floral arrays. Representations of times long since pushed to the far reaches of the mind but not entirely forgotten. Memorializations of friends, family, loved ones, and strangers coming together to retire to their final slumber. The only sounds to be heard are footsteps stepping on soft grass, as people visit the dearly departed. Names both visible and worn carved into the stone as eternal reminders of those who walked the Earth long before you. Generations come and go, experiences become memories, memories become stories, stories become dreams, and time stands still, even if just for a moment. Everyone hopes for a peaceful departure. One that's fleeting and painless, with proper goodbyes to everyone you love. But that isn't always the case. It's one thing ultimately no one can control, not even the most careful people can prevent it.

Not Joyce, not Bob, not Hopper. Life is precious and every moment should be cherished as if it's their last. The sound of that flatline pierced the air. Her heart sank and her stomach churned. The sounds of the doctors, the nurses, the cries from the kids screamed out to her like a blaring reminder of the loss before her. This couldn't be happening. Joyce stepped back and grabbed her stomach. It was flat, no bump, no trace of the life that was once there. It took her a moment to register how flat it was, but once she did, it only made her panic more. Something wasn't right. She should have a small baby bump but how could her stomach be flat? Where did the little life she so grew to adore go? Its amazing how in the matter of a few short months one can become attached to something so small. Something she hasn't even mer yet. Nothing compares to a mothers connection with their child. This little life form who she had kept warm and fed for months was gone, without any explanation, and there in front of her lay the love of her life, flatlining. The world around her grew a blur, any sound muffled beyond recognition, and there was nothing she could do about it.

But it didn't matter as Hop had woken her up out of her torment. The

nightmare abruptly came to an end as a familiar but calming darkness surrounded her. She was met by a pair of familiar blue eyes, staring at her with a look of confusion and concern "Baby— baby. Shh shh it's okay I'm right here it's okay.. nothing can hurt you. You're safe, I have you." He hugged her in a failed attempt to calm her down. It for the time being just became a stabilizer for her. "I've got you babe, you're okay. It's okay" he softly spoke to her in a soothing tone.

She leaned into his hug as sobs rocked her body. She was drenched in sweat. Her body was worked up and shaking. Trembling in fear at what she had witnessed. It dawned on her that what she had just went through was a nightmare and not reality. However, it didn't bring her much solace, and thus made it difficult for her to calm down. She was utterly terrified. An incomparable fear that only those who know the feeling of being close to true loss can understand.

Hop watched her with a look of pure love and concern. Not a single bit upset that she woke him out of a deep sleep at 3 am on a Tuesday. Comforting her is more important than sleep at the moment. Hop's never seen her like this before. So vulnerable and afraid, even more so than when Will went missing or had his episodes. She was strong and determined for him, but now it was for herself and everything was different. You can't escape your mind no matter how hard one tries. He hated seeing her this defenseless. She's been through way more than any one person should need to go through in a lifetime. All he wanted to do was help her escape her internal torment. But the best he could do was comfort her in her waking hours. "What did you see baby?" He spoke softly to her, brushing some strands of hair out of her face.

"I I.. i don't remember.." she lied. The last thing she wanted to do was relive it right now.

"Okay baby" he kissed her forehead gingerly. He grabbed a tissue or two to try his best to dry her tears. He pulled her closer and laid there quietly listening to her heartbeat slow down to a normal rate. Joyce responded to his actions by wrapping her arms around his waist. She let her head sink into the space underneath his chin. She found his heartbeat and listened to it. That constant, persistent beat slowly allowing her to be able to relax again. She listened as his



breathing slowed and the sound of soft snoring could be heard coming out of his soft lips. Everything seemed alright again. She soon found her eyelids starting to close. The weight of sleep pulling them down. Unable to fight off the necessity of a sound slumber, she succumbed silently.

Joyce hadn't had a nightmare to that extent since Bob died. For weeks she replayed the scene in her mind. It was something she wished she could forget. But it wasn't going to stop haunting her anytime soon. Joyce prayed that her returning nightmares wasn't a sign of something worse to come. But it wouldn't surprise her. Just as everything started to become normal was when Will got sick again. Why would this time be different. They didn't know if the shadow monster was coming back. No one knew that. She had been through too much already to just sit back with her guard down.

## 19. Chapter 19

Something was coming. She could feel it. It was as if it was a sixth sense or maybe the electricity in the air. Sometimes you just know. Something is sending up red flags. Your heartbeat increases, pumping spurts of adrenaline throughout your body. Everything's telling you to run, to get out of there but you don't move.

Neither did Joyce. Everything was telling her something was up. Hop, the kids, they all were tense. The room was thick and heavy. No one spoke. The silence itself was deafening. Hopper wouldn't even look at her. She pinched herself to ensure that she wasn't having another nightmare, remembering vividly the events that occurred a few hours earlier.

She was most definitely awake. She had no idea what was going on. Having just woken up she could only assume the worst. Her head pounded but she ignored it and went out to the porch to escape for a while. She knew this feeling all too well. She lit a cigarette, before taking a puff. Her eyes soon watering as she thought back to the last time she felt like this.

It was the fall of 63, November to be exact. It was cool, but not an uncomfortable cool, the type of cool that leaves you with just enough crispness to give you a quick chill. The leaves by now had mostly fallen but it hadn't mattered to her much then. Up until it did. It was a gorgeous day by any means, but for the two juniors leaning against the black Oldsmobile parked underneath a favorite old Oak, it was the painful beginning of an end. Hawkins was even smaller then than it is now and people talk. Joyce knew exactly what was coming but she'd never admit it until he confessed. Hopper had been very quiet—unusually quiet for the generally chatty teen. After what felt like an eternity to her he finally spoke. "Joy.. I— I'm sorry." He tried to hug her but she only pulled away. Tears streamed down her cheeks. Her generally neat hair thrown up into a sloppily made bun.

"Just..just tell me what you did" she shakily said. "Stop avoiding it and just admit it to me." By now she had moved herself back a few feet.

He sighed, visibly upset too. He wiped a few tears away and sniffled before digging his hands into his pockets. "I-i slept with Chrissy Carpenter. I'm so sorry.. i—"

She cut him off before he could explain. She knew he did it. Hell with the way she bragged about it you may as well have notified the president. It didn't matter. She was devastated already but hearing him say it. Hearing him admit it. Brought her pain to a whole new level. A level she didn't even know existed. She shook her head and stepped back farther. Managing to say in between sobs "it's over Hop. We're done." She walked off leaving him there at the Oldsmobile. He never tried to stop her. It wasn't his place to. She had every right to go and be furious and he knew it. Hopper hit the roof of the Oldsmobile so hard he dented it and broke his hand. He never did tell her that, she always thought it was a football injury. Since that's what he told everyone at least. He got back into the car and leaned against the steering wheel, allowing himself to completely break down. Tear streaks stained his face as he decided then and there that that was the first and only time he was ever going to hurt a woman he loved like that. He wanted to find her and make everything better but he had no idea how. Or if she'd even entertain the thought of him.

Joyce wanted him to stop her. Wanted him to fight for them. But when he didn't she knew it was really over. The once confident girl that everyone aspired to be was left vulnerable, damaged, and exposed. This left the door wide open for the opportunistic, manipulative Lonnie to waltz right in and steal her away. That's exactly what he did.

Lonnie had stepped right in that night and made her believe he cared. He shut down any chance Hop had that night before he even got there. But hop did show up to try. He brought a bouquet of sunflowers, her favorite, to start with at least. A gesture intended to be seen as his way of trying to fix this. He was confronted by Lonnie before he got anywhere near the Horowitz residence. He attempted to get past Lonnie to no avail. Hop's broken hand limited much of what he could do in the way of fighting. So he settled for giving Lonnie the flowers to give to Joyce, along with a small note saying to call him. Lonnie threw them out right after Hopper had left. So Joyce never saw them and Joyce never knew to call. If she did she would've. Hop

fell asleep with the phone by his head, hopeless and heartbroken come morning.

But that couldn't be happening now, could it? She returned to reality, unable to hold in a shaky sob. One sob turned into another before the flood gates broke and she was crying completely. Footsteps could be heard rapidly approaching from the house and the screen door flung open. Large hands gently landed on her shoulders as one moved over to lift up her chin. A very concerned Hopper met her gaze.

"Joyce baby, what's wrong?" He moved himself closer and pulled her into one of his famous bear hugs.

She stuttered but once it started to come out, it came out full force "Y-you. T-the last time everyone was this tense.. the last time you and I weren't talking like this was—"

"Was when you left me. Cause I cheated.." he nodded tearing up, acknowledging that it was as painful a memory for him too.

"Did you..? Did you cheat on me again. Just be honest" she pulled away again. "Tell me why you're so tense."

"I didn't Joyce. I'd never. I.. today's the day Sarah died." He looked down at his wrist and played with the little blue hair tie. He leaned back against the white pillar on her porch.

"Oh my god Hop.. I I'm. I'm so sorry" all the color had drained from her face. How could she forget? What kinda significant other forgets that and then turns it into something about herself? She felt beyond terrible. "I didn't know.. I'm sorry"

He forced a smile. "It's not your fault. I never told you.. I'm just trying to get through the day"

She moved to sit next to him in an attempt to comfort him. Sarah died today, years prior, and she accused him of cheating again. She wanted to run. But she didn't.

## 20. Chapter 20

It had been a few days since the incident. Now going forward she will never forget that date. So to assure that she wouldn't repeat the same mistake she did before. Everything was awkward now. Neither of them meant to make it awkward but it just happened to be. No one knew what to say, the only 'conversations' held were those that consisted of random small talk. Nothing of meaning. They didn't want to talk about it, but needed to. Neither would take the first step by bringing up the events of a few days prior. Joyce felt terrible and Hopper, frankly, was hurt but honestly understood.

Hopper wasn't going to let this ruin them. He couldn't bare to see her walk off again to be swooped up for a final time by someone better than him. Honestly, he believed that basically anyone would be better than him. He after all still saw himself as a no-good-drunk, even though to her he was everything.

The kids were off at school, he was supposed to be in at work but he told Flo to only call if it was a life or death situation, and she was napping. He took this opportunity to dig out some of Joyce's white Christmas lights, hang them up and plug them in. Trying to be as quiet as possible, he lit a bunch of little white candles placing them around the table and kitchen. He kept the normal lights off, shutting the shades as to dim the natural light and create as best of a romantic ambiance as he could. He pulled the checklist out of his pocket, the one he dreamt about months prior that made him realize what he needed. Staring for a moment at the one unchecked box circled in red crayon that read "marry her". He placed it carefully on the center of the table and waited off to the side for her to wake, holding a few fake sunflowers that he had picked up earlier in the week for her. It being the off season for Sunflowers this was the best he could do. He sat down, nervously awaiting her arrival and ultimate answer to whether or not that box will be checked. A sudden realization hit as he fumbled to check his pockets. Finding them empty of the little box he had been saving. His heart raced as he quickly and silently made his way out to his blazer, hoping and praying that it was inside the truck. It felt as if a weight was lifted off his back-- even though it was soon replaced with fear and nerves. There it was on the front seat of

his truck, right out in the open. He hurried back in hoping that in the few seconds he stepped out, she didn't wake. She didn't so he returned to his seat and resumed the painstaking wait.

After what seemed like an eternity, but in reality was only 10 minutes tops, she woke. She stood and stretched before walking out of their room. She was a little confused by the lack of light in the house, generally its very bright and well lit. She cautiously approached the kitchen, taking note of the Christmas lights first, but calmed a bit when she saw the candles. She walked to the table and picked up the list, grinning as she remembered back to when she circled that years before. "Hop.." she knew he was somewhere nearby, but didn't know his exact location.

"Will you..?" he said as he leaned against the doorway into the kitchen.

"Yes." she put the paper down and hurried over to him, curling her arms around him as she kissed him. "Ill marry you. Any day, any time, any place" she grinned. He slipped a ring on her finger to make it official.

"We're gonna have a proper wedding, Just like we always dreamed of having as kids." He wiped a tear or two that slipped from her eyes.

"I'd love that. God you don't know how long I've waited-- hoped for this day." she kissed him again leaning into his chest, he wrapped his arms around her and held her there. She gleamed, in ways hes never seen her act before. It warmed his heart and reassured him in ways no one else could. "Are those sunflowers?" she noticed the bouquet laying on the chair behind him. "Where did you find sunflowers now? its barely March" she picked them up and grinned.

"They're fake but I thought they were still beautiful. Like you." he grinned sheepishly realizing how cheesy that sounded. But to her it didn't matter, she loved it anyway.

"They're perfect. You remembered.." She teared up again. "I know this isn't the time, but I have to get this off my chest, its been eating at me ever since. I need to know."

"Of course I remembered." He shifted slightly, but smiled. "Go ahead, shoot."

"Why didn't you ever come for me? Ever try to fix it?" she looked down.

"I did.. that night. I stayed up practically all night waiting for you to call me so we can talk, i got you flowers.. well I couldn't get close to you cause Lonnie was standing guard. So I gave the note and flowers to him to give to you. When you didn't call I just assumed you didn't want to.." he put his hands into his back pocket and rocked on his heels.

"I.. I never got them. I would've called. I would've called right away.." her lower lip started to quiver, this whole time she thought he didn't care, or well hadn't cared at the time.



He kissed her before she could break down. "Don't beat yourself up over it Joy, I shouldn't have trusted Lonnie, I broke my hand hitting my dad's damn car so I couldn't even fight him. And then after that night he kept you far away from me. Then I got drafted and left.."

"That's how you broke your hand?" She chuckled slightly. "Oh god. Watching you leave.. that night when you went for your deployment. I.. oh god." she looked down. "I couldn't.."

He lifted up her chin. "None of that matters now, its in the past, we cant go back and change it, look at where its brought us now though. We're finally a family. We're engaged. We're expecting. We're truly in

love."



## 21. Chapter 21

### Notes for the Chapter:

do you guys like the gifs that I include? I try to find ones that fit the scene as best I can. But if you'd prefer without them please let me know! And yes prepare for a chapter of pure smut. ;)

"Dad! Could me and mike—"

"Mike and I" he corrected.

"Could Mike and I get married too?" She asked with a grin, glancing over at Mike who's eagerly waiting for an answer.

He nearly choked on the piece of potato he was eating. "If you want to when you're older, yes."

Her eyes teared up. She clearly didn't understand. "But why not now!?" She looked devastated.

"Honey because you're too young. Both of you are. The state doesn't allow marriage until a certain age." He rubbed her hands.

"Oh okay. I think I understand.." she looks down at her plate.

Mike took her hand. "I'll wait for you." He grinned. "I'll wait with you. I want this"

"But what you and Mike could do is get engaged or maybe a promise ring." He offered those options hoping to appease her.

"I'd love that" mike grinned. "We should get engaged. So everyone else knows not to mess with us"

El nodded. "Okay. Compromise." She took Mike's hand. "Engaged.. to be married."

Mike nods. "Yes, to be married. I'll get you a ring" Mike squeezed her hand with a grin.

"Do I say yes now?" Her eyes lit up.

"If you want. Or you can wa—"

She cut him off. "Yes!"

Mike giggled and kissed her cheek. "Okay! Then I'll get the ring as soon as possible."

El happily ate her eggos. Mike had slid closer to her.

Hop stole a glance at Joyce who was grinning. God he hoped they'd last. They were young but he makes her so happy. And she does the same. Hop knew from the start how he felt about Joyce. They met in kindergarten. He sat next to her the first day. They clicked and were basically stuck like glue from then on. The checklist came in third grade, their plans for the future together in 6th. Their first date in 7th, their split in 11th. Then years later here they were. Sitting at a kitchen table watching and eating alongside their family. He made a mental note to make sure he'll sit them both down later on and talk to them, hopefully to prevent any mistakes he's made.

He found himself slowly intertwining his fingers with hers. His gaze met hers and for a moment, words weren't needed. She blushed in response. She stood and started to gather the plates.

"I got it joy. I don't want you to be late for work. Donald will kill me for making you late again." He chuckled and took the plates.

"I have 3 hours till I need to be in! I can do my part" she chuckles.

"No. I insist." He grabbed the last plate before she could.

"Hop are you doing what I think you're doing?" She crossed her arms and tapped her foot.

"And what exactly am I doing?" He smirked.

"You're doing exactly what I didn't want you to do. Baby me. I don't need to be treated as a fragile object that's going to break the instant I do something." She giggled. "Although I do Kind of find this super protective side to be highly attractive." She pulled at his collar

slightly and stood on her tippy toes to kiss him.

"I just think you should take it easy. So yeah.. I'm doing exactly what you're thinking" he grinned and gently poked her nose lovingly. "But me being overprotective over the both of you is not going to change. I just want you to be safe." He grinned

"Well how about you drop me off at work today so you know I will be safe, and then we can have some alone time after the kids head to school." She smirked and undid a few buttons on her flannel, biting her lower lip slightly as she picked up a dishcloth to help dry the dishes.



She eagerly awaited to see his reaction. Half hoping what she did wasn't too tacky. She shouldn't be so insecure but that was leftover from Lonnie. There wasn't much fixing there. That damage was long since done.

One look from her and Hop was gone. The biting of the lip, even slightly, was fuel to the fire. Then watching her unbutton her shirt slight. He needed to use every ounce of strength he has to resist grabbing her and bending her over right there. Which frankly she'd love. Just, the kids were home and just in the other room. She couldn't do that in front of them.

The look he gave her sent shivers up her spine. But good shivers, not the kind you get when you're cold, but the kind you get from the electricity, the excitement of true love.



"Joyce.." he growled out curling around behind her. He pressed his hard member against her back. A slight gasp escaped her but she smirked wider. Her actions having the exact effect she wanted.

"Hop" she whined. "Get the kids to school first.. then we can" she turned around to face him. She slid up onto the counter so she could kiss him easily. He was a foot taller than her so height was always an issue. He had been taller than her since about 8th grade. So she was used to it. She planted small kisses across his jawline and down his neck. She loved how his beard felt rubbing and scratching against her skin as she moves along him. He held her close. Soft gasps escaped his mouth.

He slid his hands underneath her shirt. His cool and wet fingertips slid across her body as his lips met hers. He slowly crawled his hands up he'd back, unclasping her bra. He ripped it off her, desperate to touch, to feel her.

"Hop that was my favorite bra.." she whimpered slightly knowing it was ruined now.

"I'll get you a new one.. or a few" he smirks and kisses at her neck. He slid his thumbs across her nipples, flicking and teasing them. She gasped and kissed him to keep quiet. He gently massaged each breast carefully. Hoping she wasn't too sore yet to enjoy this. Which frankly even if they were shed be enjoying this beyond belief.

It was short lived. Hoppers body blocked most of what was going on even though you couldn't see anything anyway. Will walked in. "M-

oh. Uh. We're gonna be late.."

Hop grumbled. "Guys get in the car. I'll be right there." Joyce didn't want to let go either but she did. "Wait for me" He kissed her one last time before heading to his blazer full of kids.

"I will" she called back smirking as she hopped down from the counter.

## 22. Chapter 22

She proceeded to her room. Why was picking out what to wear. Or rather what not to wear so difficult? He'll love her no matter what she wears but it's gotta be perfect. She stood in front of the mirror admiring her small baby bump for a second before deciding what she was going to do. She had on a long flannel, that she chose to completely unbutton and leave open. The shirt itself went slightly past her ass so she opted to lose everything but the shirt. Her small frame and nice figure fitting perfectly into that shirt. It covered just enough to be a big tease. She picked up her makeup bag and dig through it till she found the bright red lipstick that matched the color of her shirt. She loosely combed out her hair and then stood admiring the reflection staring back at her.



For once she was extremely self confident. She felt like she should feel— great. She lit a cigarette and leaned against the wall.

It didn't take long as he fumbled into the house quickly. Not seeing her at first but doing a double take, then slowly and surely checking her out with a smirk. His eyes looked and examined everything. He took mental notes of every curve, mark, and line she had. He took his time slowly undressing himself, watching as she smirked and ever so slowly walked towards him.

He walked up and wrapped his arms around her, unable to control himself any longer as he feverishly kissed her. She wrapped her legs around his hips and he leaned her against the wall.

"Hop.. I need you. Fuck me." She whispered.

He kissed her, smirking slightly. He slid his fingers up underneath her loose shirt and started massaging her chest again. "Tell me how bad you want me."

"Badly. Please hop" she begged, sliding herself across his bulge.

He growled out. "Fuck joy.." he reached for his belt. He fumbled slightly but easily unbuckled and shimmed his pants down. She dug her nails into his back waiting anxiously for him to do something.

He chuckled at how impatient she was. "Close your eyes" he kissed at her neck pressing her back into the wall farther. Shifting his weight onto hers.

She did as told. Biting her lower lip as she leaned her head back. She knew exactly what he was doing— purposely making it so she had no idea when he was gonna enter. She loved and hated it when he did this. It felt like an eternity, but was a matter of at most 30 seconds, before she felt him push his way in hard and fast. She let out a loud moan and her body twitched desperate for more friction.

He placed his hand over her mouth and whispered to her. "Open, But quiet"

She opened and nodded. Her gaze met with his. He didn't move his hand, but started thrusting deeply and slowly. He held her in place. She was startled to say the least by his hand but knew he wouldn't hurt her. Not like Lonnie. She relaxed as he started moving. Arching her back and shimmying down onto him as far as she could. Her body rocked with his, together as one power house. Joyce tried to remain quiet but she moaned into his hand, the warmth growing continuously until she couldn't hold off anymore. Her core tightened around him. He surprisingly wasn't expecting it. So the noise he made sent chills of pure pleasure up her spine. He was loving it beyond words. He pushed on pausing slightly just so she can catch her breath



as she came down from her high. He didn't give her much time to recover before he slammed back into her. She inhaled sharply and jumped startled. She smirked and managed to say "someone's a little eager aren't we?" in a teasing enough way to challenge him.

Challenge accepted. He removed himself and slammed back in fully again, growling lowly as she moans. He kissed at her neck and slightly down her chest. He didn't last as long as he hoped. But before long his thrusts became weak and uneven. She allowed herself to come with him. He held himself deep inside her until he was empty.

He removed himself and gently carried her over to the couch where they both could regain their composure and get ready for their perspective jobs.

"Jesus Hop.." she smirked and kissed him before curling up underneath his arm.

"I take it you liked that?" He smirked

"Eh. It wasn't that good" she said calmly.

His face grew a pasty white. "What?!"

She burst out laughing. "Hop! I'm kidding. It was amazing. Do you think if I didn't like it I'd have let you get that far?" She gave him a look.

He chuckled, sighing in relief as color returned to his face. "Okay that's true. I'd believe that... But seriously if I ever overstep. Tell me. I never ever want to hurt you. Let alone scare you into doing something you're not comfortable with." He took her hand.

"I know Hop. I will. But it won't happen." She kissed him and squeezed his hand. After a short while she stood.

He whined. "Do you havvveee to go?" He smirked.

"Yes. Stop whining. You're such a child!" She giggled and teased.

"But I'm your child." He pouted But his expression soon changed to one of embarrassment. "No I'm not your child. That didn't work out as

well as I had planned."

She scrunched her nose as she laughed. "No you're not my child but you are my Hop. So you get a pass" she grins and kisses him before going and changes into her uniform, pulling on her leather coat over it. Feeling very confident and spunky, for a change. She peered around the door to see if she could sneak up on him. But he wasn't where she left him.



She wasn't sure why but her heart sank a little. She didn't know where he was and that worried her.

## 23. Chapter 23

She shrugged it off, assuming he's in the bathroom or something. She glanced at the clock. 9:30. "Shit!" She grabbed her keys. Depending on traffic, she may be late. She couldn't be late again. "Hop I gotta go! I'll pick up dinner on the way home later! Don't forget the kids at school!" She shouted while she headed out the door. She hopped in Johnathan's car and sped off. Not thinking anything of his lack of a response or that his blazer was still parked out front. She made it to work with 5 minutes to spare.

The day was fairly uneventful. The regulars came and went. The most unusual thing being the new person who stopped in on their way to Indianapolis. She made small talk with everyone who came in. Helped everyone with anything they needed.



Checking her watch every now and then waiting for lunch to roll around. Lunch came and went but Hopper didn't, which was unusual. Since he always came, but she figured maybe he was actually on a call for a change. She hoped it was something exciting. Nothing major had happened recently that required real police work so he was, needless to say, bored. She went back to work. She was working late that night, so she didn't budge when it came time to pickup the kids. It grew quiet around that time. Well it was quiet until she heard a very familiar, unwelcomed voice, that she hasn't heard in a long, long time.

"Is that you? Joyce?" A tall blonde wearing designer clothing stood in the doorway removing her sunglasses. She grinned widely.

"Oh uh hi, Chrissy!" She forced a smile.

"How long has it been?! Since graduation?" She came over, acting as if they were best friends. She seemed to forget completely that she was the cause of her and Hop's breakup.

"Yeah basically" Joyce chuckles uneasily. "What brings you back to Hawkins?"

"I'm looking for Hopper! Do you happen to know where he is?" She grinned.

Her heart raced. Why out of all people does she want him? "I don't" she shrugged.

Chrissy rolled her eyes. "Great so I came all the way out here and he's not here."



"Well. Chrissy he lives here I just don't know of his exact whereabouts at this exact minute." Joyce went back to fixing whatever was at the counter.

"Wouldn't you know though? I heard you're friends with him." She

crossed her arms.

"I'm working right now, he's working right now. What do you need to tell him? I'll let him know if I see him." She didn't want to fully reveal how involved she was with him just yet.

"I just need to talk to him. It's not of important as of right now." She stood tall. "I'm staying at the hotel in Jonesboro. Here's my room number. Call me if you happen to see him." She watched as Joyce stood and walked over to take it.

Joyce smiled fakely. "I will" she nodded before walking back to her seat.

"Have you gained weight?" She tilted her head, watching her walk back to the seat. Chrissy has always been a very straightforward, no filtered person.

This made Joyce mad. Partially influenced by hormones. "I'm pregnant. Now can I help you with anything else?" She sassed back, remaining very calm.

"Hmph. No. Just call if you find Jimmy." She turned and left.

Both of them hated it whenever someone called Hop jimmy. Hop even more so than Joyce. It was always either Jim, Hop or Hopper. James if he got in trouble. Which frankly they both did quite often growing up. She'd go anywhere and do anything with him. No matter how bad it was.

As 5 o'clock rounded, she received a phone call. It was the school.

"Ms Byers?" The secretary said, looking at the worried El and Will sitting before her.

"Yes?" She looked puzzled.

"It's 5.. no one came to get Will and El.." she spoke softly.

"What?! Hopper was supposed to come by and get them. He never went? I'll be right there" she hung up grabbing her keys. "Donald I'm

taking my 30 minute break." She said walking out the door shaking her head. "Damn it Hop. How could you forget?" She thought out loud. After fumbling with the keys for a bit she got Jonathan's car started and was soon on her way to pick up the kids.

She parked and headed in. "I'm sorry guys." She hugged them both tightly. "Dad was supposed to have gotten you but I don't know what happened."

They both hugged her. "It's okay" El said with a smile.

"Will you two be okay at home alone until dad gets home? I'm closing the store tonight. Dad said he'd get dinner done. He should be home soon." She lead them to the car and made sure they were settled before driving off.

"Yeah we'll be fine mom." Will reassures.

"Okay" Joyce grins. Hop wasn't at the house when she dropped the kids off, which she found odd but she couldn't do much about it. She had to work.

The last few hours of work went by agonizingly slow. She was starving. She locked up the store and made her way back home. She pulled up at 8:15, and didn't see hopper's truck. "Shit." She got out and went inside. "Guys?"

El and Will were sitting at the table, eating eggos. "Mom!"

"Where's dad? And who's doing dinner..?" She crossed her arms.

They shrug. "He didn't come home so were eating eggos." El giggles and happily munches away.

"Okay.. well I'll be right back then. I'm gonna grab McDonald's on the way home. Do you guys want anything?"

El shook her head. Will nodded. "Yeah! A burger sounds good."

"Okay! I'm gonna go see if I can find dad then I'll get food." Joyce sped off to the station. His blazer wasn't there either. Where the hell is he? She walked into the station and found Flo.

"Joyce!" Flo smiled. "Whatcha need honey?"

"Have you seen Hop?" She was more than annoyed by now.

"No.. he never showed up. I figured he got busy with you. He's been talking nonstop about wanting to go with you to an appointment. So I thought that's what he did. He's not with you?"

"N-no I saw him this morning before I left for work. He didn't say anything. He seemed happy.. this isn't like him" She started to tear up.

"Oh honey" Flo stood and went over to hug her.

She couldn't help but to think the worst. She let out a slight sob.  
"What if he bolted?"

## 24. Chapter 24

"Why would Hopper do that?" Flo reassured.

"I don't know.. Chrissy came back today. I don't know if you remember her." She grabbed a tissue. Leaning against the wall of the station. Staring at a spot on the floor. Something that bothered her immensely but she had no real explanation as to why it did.

Flo walked over to her from around the counter. "I don't know if I do. Who is she?"

"She's the one he cheated on me with way back when. She came back looking for him she wouldn't tell me why but... I don't. I don't know." She looked down and started to play with the ring on her finger.

"He had a reason to ask you to marry him. A very good reason. I can't see him just throwing that all away cause of some stupid thing he did in high school. Chrissy coming back after all this time, shouldn't have any impact on you two as a couple." Flo took her hand.

"Shouldn't doesn't mean it doesn't" she turned covering her mouth in an attempt to stifle a sob that escaped  
She couldn't do this again. She couldn't be second choice to him again. Or third choice. She seemed to only be Bob's first choice but he was gone. Taken from her before they ever had a chance.

"Why would he do that honey? Maybe he got called to Jonesboro or out to Roane or to Indianapolis for some police business. It's possible it's happened before." Flo rubbed her arm. "I got in late so it's possible he did get called away. He gave me the morning off. I'll radio him again okay?"

Joyce shrugs. "I'm not Chrissy or Diane. I'm not.. I'm not them. I'm not blonde. I-I don't fit that type. I'm not that pretty. I don't have a perfect figure. I'm small.." she pulled her coat closer around herself.

Flo stopped in her path back towards the radio. She turned around and walked back immediately hugging her. "He loves you. I've seen the way he looks at you Joyce. No ones perfect. But you're perfect to



him. Don't do this to yourself. Feel the need to change into some 'type' for him. He doesn't want that. He'd want you to be comfortable." She rubs her back. "We'll find him."

Joyce nods and sits as Flo goes to radio him without avail. "I haven't checked his house or cabin yet.. call me if you find him please Flo?"

"Of course, please do the same." Flo Gave her a reassuring smile and watched her leave.

Joyce places a hand on her stomach and slowly made her way back to the car. She winced slightly feeling a sharp pain in her abdomen. "No no baby. It's too soon. Please no" she whimpered. Hoping it was nothing worse than just a stress induced thing. The last thing she needed right now was to miscarry the little life form she's fallen so much in love with already. The pain soon subsided and her focus was brought back to finding Hop.

The drive across town towards hoppers trailer was slow. No one seemed to be out and it was dark. The cloud cover that night was unbelievably thick. A heavy dense fog lined the streets. She glanced around his front lawn finding no trace of the Blazer whatsoever. She got out and went up to the door and knocked. Nothing. She peered inside to find it mostly just used for storage. She had been over a few times. Flashbacks of both good and bad times were brought to the forefront's of her mind.

Thoughts raced her mind. Everything she missed. Everything she needs. Images flashed across her eyelids. Little things mostly. But sometimes those little things truly mean the most.

His smell as he got out of the shower. She loved his shampoo, it wasn't overpowering but it wasn't that subtle either. She loved his routine. Just something about it that she couldn't place at the current moment that made her so happy. Maybe it was the ability to watch and know fully what he was going to do next. Then it was his touch as he embraced her. It was something that she cherished beyond words. She never told him how much she loved the little things— and now it was probably too late.

Then came the times they shared a cigarette and the occasional drink. Even though he shouldn't be smoking anymore. He was always more

of beer-or-something-strong guy whereas she most definitely was a beer girl with the occasional glass of wine. She hated anything fruity and when guys assumed that she liked those little fruity drinks. But it didn't matter anymore, she'd give anything to have Hop offer her some stupid little fruity drink.

She missed his smile— Him. She missed him. She missed everything about him.

She was determined to find him now— As if she wasn't before. Now to check the cabin. She hurried back towards her car. Driving as fast as she could without putting herself in imminent danger. She made it as far as she could with her car which frankly wasn't very far, and hiked the rest of the way. Nothing. No blazer. No sign of life inside the cabin either. She hit the cabin door hard. "Damn it!" She leaned against the door. The idea that he was gone loomed heavily over her head.

She's had a bad feeling for weeks now. Everything was going perfect. Why wouldn't it go south? It had so many times before.

She checked if the cabin was open. It was to her surprise. She opted to call Flo to check in. She waited for her to answer.

After a few rings the familiar click was heard. "Hello?" She sounded shaky.

Her heart sank "Flo it's Joyce.. I'm at the cabin, nothing. H-has there been anything new?"

"Joyce.. we found his Blazer in a ditch.. it looks like he wrecked but he's nowhere to be found. We're searching now. I'll call if w—"

Joyce started to cry "oh god" and then the pain hit hurt again. She cried out in pain. Nearly unable to stand.

"Joyce!? Are you okay?!" Flo sounded worried. She knew she wasn't that far along and that labor now almost surely meant a miscarriage.

"No! I— I need an ambulance. It hurts! It's too early. She can't come this early!" She cried more, clutching her stomach.

"I'm sending someone now Joyce. Hang in there. Stay on the line with

me" Flo tried her best to remain calm.

Joyce had everything, but now it all slipped from her grasp. Like water dripping through the cracks. Once the levee breaks it all comes rushing in.

Swept away until there's nothing left.

## 25. Chapter 25

Sirens. Flashing lights. The sound of muffled voices approaching. Then nothing. This empty blackness surrounded her. Then movement, lifting onto a somewhat comfortable moving object. Something she realized later was a stretcher. Then blackness again. Then pain, an internal, inaudible-to-the-outside-world, agonizing scream. Then the ever so familiar blackness. It was somewhat comforting. She felt safe, warm. It was quiet and still— Eerily so. She felt herself drifting further and further away from reality. Away from herself, her family, and the life she was leaving behind. It scared her, but it didn't seem to matter.

She heard someone calling her name from a distance. As if hearing it from a distant loudspeaker, calling her back into reality. Into the real world, dragging her away from the peaceful emptiness that surrounded her a moment before. She slowly opened her eyes and weakly called for Hopper. "Hop?" She heard two separate heart monitors. Both beating strongly, as her eyes adjusted to the bright lights of the hospital room surrounding her, she started to remember more. She looked down at her hand, noticing the IV placed into her vein. It took her a moment but she realized where she was. Her eyes met the doctor who was calling her name.

"No I'm sorry. Hopper isn't here but your family is coming in and Flo is here, how are you feeling?" The doctor placed a stethoscope on her stomach.

Her lower lip quivered. "I I'm okay now I think. I feel much better.. m-my baby?" She wiped a tear that slipped.

"Perfectly fine. They were Braxton-Hicks contractions brought on upon by stress. You also had an anxiety attack and that combined with the pain from the contractions caused you to pass out. Other than that you seem perfectly healthy." The doctor reassured.

Joyce smiles and rubs her stomach. "I was so scared I lost her.. or him. I think it's a her." She giggled slightly. "Can you send Flo in please?"

The doctor motions to a nurse who goes to retrieve her from the waiting room. "Would you like to know the gender?"

She didn't at first but she's dying to now. "Yeah. I would— but wait. I need my fiancé to be here first. So not right now." She was beyond curious but Hopper would be very upset if he wasn't there to see it and go through the experience with her.

The doctor smiles. "I understand completely. Hopefully he'll be here soon." The doctor smiles. "You rest okay? We're gonna keep you overnight to just double check that the baby is okay. Okay?"

"Okay.. But my kids. They—" she was interrupted.

"I'll watch them" Flo suggests.

"Or I will." Karen could be seen standing in the entrance way carrying flowers, behind where Mike, El, and Will were standing.

"Thank you guys" Joyce grins. "Hey guys. Cmere!"

"Mom are you okay?" El asks taking her hand. "Are both of you?"

Joyce nods and moves over so she can sit on the bed next to her. "I'm sorry I didn't get to bring you food will."

Will giggled from his seat next to her bed. "It's okay mom. This is a valid excuse."

Flo let go of her arm. "I'm gonna go check in with the guys to see if they found anything."

Joyce nods and turns back to El who looked extremely worried. She knew who she was more worried about.

"Where is he..." she says quietly before cuddling up next to Joyce. El clearly felt slightly abandoned by him. But was more worried than anything. This wasn't normal for Hop.

Joyce wrapped an arm around her. "I don't know.. We'll find him honey. We have too. I won't stop until we do. We owe him that." She smiled at her reassuringly.

Just the smile was what she needed. "Okay." She looked exhausted.

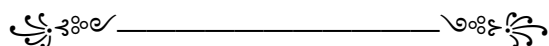
"Make sure you get some sleep when you go home with Mike okay?" Joyce glanced at Mike who gave her a nod and a thumbs up in response.

She nodded "can we stay a little bit first?"

Joyce kisses her forehead. "Of course you can. You know I love spending time with you guys. I love you all."

That got a grin from El. "Am I your family too? One of your kids? Definitely?"

"Definitely." She hugs El. "You're my daughter. Forever and always. And I love you." She takes her hand.



A few hours had passed and she found herself alone. Well except for the comforting beat from the Doppler machine monitoring the baby's heartbeat. Joyce needed sleep but she couldn't stop thinking about Hopper. She picked up the phone and dialed Hopper's mother. Fully knowing how late it was.

The phone rang and rang until it stopped. No one picked up. She sighed and tried again. This time someone picked up. His mom was half asleep. "Hello?"

"Hi Mrs Hopper. I'm sorry to bother you at this hour but I was wondering if Hopper was with you?"

"I'm sorry who is this?" She clearly started to wake up a bit more.

"Joyce." She says quietly.

"Oh Joyce! I'm sorry I didn't recognize you. No he's not here. What's wrong sweetie? Are you okay?" Hops mom had always loved Joyce. She was always like a daughter to her.

"Yeah I'm fine.. just a scare that landed me in the hospital. I'm perfectly healthy. The baby is too." She smiles.

"Baby..?" She sounded shocked but happy.

"Hop didn't tell you..?" Joyce's color drained.

"No I've been overseas. I haven't gotten to talk to him in a while.. you're pregnant?"

"Yeah. 5 months.. " Joyce gulped slightly

"Is it Hop's?" She asks.

"Yeah.. he's just. Went to work earlier and hasn't come back yet. He's probably over in Roane or Indianapolis." She said reassuringly

"Honey is anyone with you?"

"No.."

"I'm coming over right now. Okay? I'll be there in a few hours. You shouldn't be alone. Plus we need to catch up. I'm getting my stuff now."

"Okay" Joyce giggles. "I'll see you soon. Bye." She hangs up and decides to phone the Wheelers just to check in.

Joyce hears someone pickup. "Hey mrs-

El picks up. "Mom?" She sounds like she's been crying.

"El? What's wrong honey?" She was concerned.

"I can't find him." She whimpered

"What honey?" Realization set in.

She whimpered again. "I can't find him."

## 26. Chapter 26

Joyce felt the warm sunlight hit her face. She felt beyond safe as familiar welcoming arms wrapped around her from behind. She felt the blades of grass through the red and white checkered blanket she was laying on. It was mid spring, flowers were blooming, birds were chirping and singing their songs of innocence and purity. She turned to face whoever was laying behind her. There he was. Her perfect missing Hopper. Well he wasn't missing anymore. Or so she thought. She watched as he faded to dust before her very eyes. The surroundings went next. She stood up on the only thing that remained from that wonderful place— The blanket. She looked around, afraid. It was nothingness with a liquid covering what she could only believe was the floor.

Suddenly El appeared and took her hand. "Mom. It's me. Come with me" her voice echoed off of nothing. But she followed. El lead her through the darkness to what appeared to be a wall. With a window into the upside down. "Look in Mom"

Joyce did. She saw Hop laying there. "HOPPER?!" She yelled but was soon woken up by Hop's mom.

"Joyce, Honey. Shh shh it's okay." Hop's mother, Fran, held her hand and tried to calm her.

Joyce was breathing heavily as her eyes adjusted to the light. Two heartbeat monitors could be heard which calmed her once again. It was just a dream joyce. Just a dream. Breathe. She thought to herself. But it felt more than a dream. It felt real. She didn't know where Hop was and it scared her to think that he may be stuck in there. Where she nearly lost will years prior. "Thank you Fran, for being here"

"You're welcome. I wouldn't miss the chance to be here with you. You've always been basically a daughter to me. So are you and Hopper back together then? Since I was overseas I've missed a lot." She chuckled slightly.

"Yeah we are." She couldn't help but grin widely. "We're engaged and expecting."



His mom's face lit up as a warm smile formed across her face. "About Damn time he wizened up. Don't get me wrong I liked Diane and I loved Sarah but Diane was not you. I'm so glad he came back to you." She rubbed Joyce's hand with her fingers.

Joyce blushed. "Yeah. I'm glad he did too. You have to meet his adopted daughter and my kids too!"

"He's got an adopted daughter? I can't wait to meet everyone!" She grinned. "Where is he by the way?"

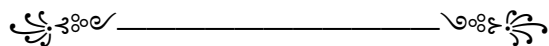
"We don't know.. we can't seem to find him" Joyce's smile faded.

Her face didn't hide a single thing about how she was feeling. "He's missing?"

"Yeah.."

Fran hugged her. "We'll find him"

Joyce nodded. "We have to."



Later that day, Joyce slowly got out of Fran's car, taking it easy. Fran insisted that she stayed to watch over Joyce and the kids while Hopper was missing, and frankly Joyce didn't mind. She liked the company.

"I'll call Mrs Wheeler to have the kids brought over, okay?" She walked over to the phone and dialed Karen's number. After talking for a little while she smiled and said her goodbyes. "Okay they'll be here shortly." Joyce sat and lit a cigarette. She desperately needed to talk to el. "I need to get my car back. It's at hopper's cabin."

"Oh I know where that is! We can go get it later." Fran smiles.

The all too familiar chills came over her as lights flickered. The sense that things were coming back, maybe.

The phone rang. Fran motioned to Joyce that she'll get it and went to pick it up. "Hello?" Distant conversation could be heard. "Hopper?"

Hop. Slow down. What's going on. Where are you?" More conversation could be heard. Joyce's heart began to race. She sat up. "Uh huh." Fran could be heard agreeing to whatever he was saying. "Yes she's right here. She's okay— yes she was in the hospital. Braxton-Hicks. Yes." There was silence out of Fran. Joyce needed to talk to him. Where was he? Was he okay? Was he hurt? But Fran was taking her time getting the whole story. Normally she'd be patient but this time she was as impatient as a toddler with ice cream. "The baby is okay. The kids too. Yes I'm staying with them— Yeah. I haven't met the kids yet. They're coming soon. Yes she's scared. Yep. Here she is" Fran handed the phone over to Joyce.

"Hop?!" Joyce said Into the phone crying a little.

"Joy— baby I'm so sorry. I — I'll explain everything when I'm home. I promise." He sounded very upset.

"When are you coming home?! They found your truck!" She frantically asked.

"Yeah I know. Some kid took it for a Joy ride. Before I could stop it he wrecked and I— I'm in New York."

"What? Why are you in New York!? Are you okay?!" Joyce was breathing heavily.

"I needed to come with the kid. He was airlifted to NY Pres. I don't know when I can come home. It's more complicated than that. I'll explain fully when I see you. I hope you understand."

"Why can't you explain now?!" It hit her. "Th-the lights?"

"Yes."

"Where are you staying?" She grabbed a pen and a pad of paper.

"The Holiday Inn on West 29th street. But don't come.. it's not safe. You don't need to be involved in this. You hear me? I want you to stay." He wanted nothing more than to be with her.

"Okay... I love you.. please stay safe."

"I love you too. Bye Joyce." He hung up. She ripped the piece of paper off and went for a bag.

"Fran. I hate to do this to you but—"

"I'd be more than happy to watch the kids!" She grinned

"Okay— here they are now" she watched as El and Will walked in. She went over and hugged them both, then explaining the situation. Will was excited to meet this new grandmother. El didn't quite understand but Joyce promised that she'd bring Hopper back.

El wanted to do them both proud so she was going to give Fran a chance.

Fran drove them to get Joyce's car. Joyce loaded up the trunk and sped off to the closest airport and bought a plane ticket. She sat down in the terminal and waited.

## 27. Chapter 27

It felt like forever. The plane ride. The descent down to the runway. The lining up at the terminal. Unloading her carry-on she walked through the terminal at the bustling JFK airport. She wasn't used to this many people in such an enclosed area but she'd deal with it. She made her way out to the AirTrain and found a seat. Clutching her ticket to the station in Jamaica she took a deep breath, and attempted to calm herself down. It worked somewhat. All she kept thinking was that this will take her one step closer to being back with Hop. To knowing that he's safe. She handed her ticket over to the conductor who stamped it and gave her a nod before they headed towards their destination. The steel wheels screeched and squealed as they rolled along the steel rail. The cars rocked back and forth. It wasn't so hard that it was uncomfortable but she got lost looking out the window as the train pushed forward. It didn't take long to reach Jamaica. She got off on the platform and found the nearest train to Penn station. It wouldn't be arriving for another hour or so, so she sat down on the platform and waited for the LIRR's engine to pull in. She watched as trains came and went.

The familiar rumble appeared heading west. The platform soon became swarmed with people awaiting the train. Like clockwork people moved out of the way and passengers got off and disbursed into the crowd. She held on tightly to her small bag and her purse as she soon found that all the seats in that car were taken. She sighed and tried to get comfortable standing. It wasn't that far of a ride. Someone got her attention.

"Miss?" The young man smiled warmly.

"Yes?" She stood up showing she was paying attention.

"Have my seat please. I don't need it." He smiled and stood and motioned for her to come over.

"Are you sure? You were here before me" she played with the button on her shirt.

"Absolutely positive" he smiled and nodded signaling for her to come

over.

"Okay thank you" She gently placed a hand on his shoulder. "You're a life saver" she sat down, her feet were killing her. Her ankles haven't swelled yet but it's still not easy on her joints.

He blushed slightly at that. "You're very welcome. Where you headed?"

"Penn, you?" She brushed her hair back as she got comfortable

"Same, first time in the city?"

"Second. But it feels like it." She chuckles.

"I know that feeling. Where you from?"

"Indiana. You?"

"Oh I'm from here, Long Island more specifically" he chuckled. "What brings you to NYC? Something fun?"

"I'm here to visit my fiancé. Who's with someone in NY Pres." She shrugged.

"Oh! Are you a physician? I'm a resident out of Stony Brook!" He grinned.

"I'm not, I wish though. I unfortunately never thought about doing anything like that back when I was in college. My fiancé he's a cop and is with some kid who got into an accident or something that was transported via medevac to Pres. I don't really know what's going on yet." She shrugged.

"Oh your fiancé is Hopper?"

"Yes.. how do you know him?" She looked confused.

"The kid he brought in is kinda infamous with the hospitals here. It's a long long story." He chuckled. The train soon pulled into Penn station.

She sighed and stood gathering her things. "Are you headed to Pres straight away?"

"I am. Are you?"

"No.. well thank you for the seat. I really do appreciate it." She smiled and collected herself. "I never caught your name, in Joyce."

He gave her a friendly smile and shook her hand. "Nice to meet you Joyce. I'm Derek." The dark haired man chuckled before walking out ahead of her.

She followed for a little bit before she made her way towards the street above and found a taxi. She picked up the piece of paper and flagged down a taxi. She sat down and gave the driver the address. He nodded not saying much to her and headed on its way. It didn't take long before they got stuck in the bustling New York traffic. Horns blared, traffic moved slowly throughout the streets. Lights turned from red to green and back again. Frankly it would've been much faster to walk as it was only a few blocks over. But she didn't know how to honestly get there so she opted for this. After a while she made it to the hotel. She paid the taxi driver and got out. She walked into the hotel and looked around the lobby. Thinking— well really hoping he may be down there. He wasn't.

She walked to the elevator and pressed the button. Taking note of the patter on the rug as it came down to her. It hit her as she went to board that she had no idea what room he was in. She turned around and patted her pockets as she walked up to the front desk.

"Ma'am can I help you?" The young desk clerk asked.

"Yes actually. I lost my room key, can I get another? The rooms under my fiancé's name. James Hopper."

He started to type away at the computer. "Ah yes. Room 607. James Hopper. Here you go ma'am" he handed one over.

She smiled and shrugged a little. Giving him an extra cute nose scrunch.

"Thank you so much" she took it and walked towards the elevator.

Wow that was easy. She never expected it to be that simple. She figured he couldn't give out a key to someone claiming to be someone. But maybe he couldn't but did anyway cause it was her.

She made her way to room 607. Once again waiting for that elevator to come down. It dinged and she boarded. She went to the room and unlocked the door. Walking in. By now it was in the late afternoon and the room was empty. She locked the door, found Hops hat and sat down on the bed. She was exhausted but wanted to wait for him. That didn't last long as she found herself laying back and drifting off to sleep.

## 28. Chapter 28

She didn't know how long it had been, or how long she had been asleep. But she soon heard the familiar click of the hotel door opening. The room was dark but she knew his voice. She didn't recognize the second voice though. She heard his laugh and someone else's laugh— some female laugh. It didn't take her long to realize that the other voice she heard was female. Memories flooded back and she sat up. Waiting for him to walk into the bedroom of the suite. She didn't realize how big it was until now. The bedroom was separate from the main living room and kitchen. She walked quietly over to the door attempting to see. She couldn't. She heard more giggles and conversation, which she also couldn't decipher what was being said. She glanced at the clock, 10 pm. She let out a shaky sigh trying to remain quiet. She tried to build up the courage to come out. But she couldn't. Not yet. She wanted to believe that it was nothing. But his previous actions set a precedent that she couldn't just ignore. She knew he didn't know she was there so would it really be that far fetched? He just vanished from home, without a word till the call. She took a deep breath. After a little while, she still heard the voices. She quietly stepped out. Still unable to be seen from where they were sitting.

She heard him laugh out loud, seemingly enjoying himself. It warmed her heart. She missed him. She glanced around the corner.

Just enough to see a tall strawberry blonde sitting across from him drinking a beer. He had one too. She crossed her arms as she got a chill briefly and stepped out. The woman noticed her first. Joyce's fists were tightly clenched as she was fighting back tears. She forced a smile.

The woman gave a puzzled look directed at Hop. Who hadn't looked up yet. He did a double take and his smile faded for a second. He unintentionally slammed his beer down and shot up running over to her where he then hugged her tightly. She didn't expect that but his hug caused her to relax immediately. He kissed her forehead inhaling deeply as he tries not to cry.

"Hop.." Joyce says as she snuggles closer.



"What are you doing here?" He said in a slightly pain filled way.

"I know you said not to but I had to." She said quietly making eye contact the entire time.

"Oh I'm so glad you're here" he sounded so relieved. It washed all her worry, all her doubt away. She felt worlds better knowing that he was excited she's here. "Come sit. I want to introduce you to the agent assigned to the kids case. She's out of the New York branch of the FBI. Apparently he's involved in a lot of big organized crime." Hop rubbed at the back of his neck.

"Oh she's an agent?" Joyce says quizzically.

"Yeah. I'm sure it doesn't look like that. But, I love you and only you. She may want out working relationship to be more than that but I don't."

She interjected "it's safe to say we're friends. And you are miss?"

"His fiancée, Joyce."

"Oh so this is the infamous Joyce?" She huffs slightly as she chuckled

Hop gave her a disapproving but soft look.

Joyce definitely didn't like that. She tried her best to be the better person and ignore it.

"I'm Sandra. The lead on your fiancé's case. That boy he encountered is a very very dangerous individual." She motions to crime scene photos strewn about.

Joyce picked up the boys mug shots and noticed something. Something that made her heart stop and she could see it in Hop's eyes also. She motioned to the boys wrist. "What does 003 mean?" She asked playing stupid.

"We're not sure. We just figured it was something related to gang members. His name is tucker. He's been bounced around between foster homes ever since he was 5. In and out of street gangs. Committed robberies, assaults, were trying to get him currently on

manslaughter charges. He bolted from NYC right as he became lead suspect in this murder case. The Vic was a worker for the NY DOE. Seemingly completely random." Sandra shrugged. "Just gotta connect the dots."

Joyce's poker face was on point. She hid anything she even remotely knew about the labs kids. "Poor kid. It's horrible to think how he lacked a true family and this came out of that."

"Yeah I guess it is. It happens quite often unfortunately and it happened to him. He's turning 18 soon so he will be tried as an adult."

"He's still just a kid.. you're gonna try him as an adult?" Joyce's heart ached.

Hopper interjected. "Joyce he's dangerous. And it's getting late. We can continue this tomorrow Sandra." Hop insisted while standing and helping Joyce up. Sandra nodded and gathered her things and left.

Joyce reluctantly followed. "Hop he's just a kid. Did you see.."

"Yes but as far as I can tell he has no powers. He has killed people Joyce.. and not in defense. He enjoys it." He sighs. "Let's just go lay down and snuggle. I've missed you" he smirks

"I've missed you too" She couldn't help but grin. She liked the idea of cuddling.

He picked her up and kissed her. "Maybe a little more than just cuddling"

"Ooh.." she smirked. "Like what?" She knew exactly what he was thinking.

"Well hmm." He smirked and laid her down on the bed. He slipped a hand under her shirt. She giggled and kissed him, squirming a bit.

"I like where this is going" she smirked.

"Me too" he slowly undid the buttons on her shirt. He started kissing a trail up her torso. Starting at her pants line and working his way up

slowly to her lips. She kissed him passionately. Her world was once again on fire.

## 29. Chapter 29

### Notes for the Chapter:

Now you guys are fully up to date as well <:

Joyce giggled and squirmed as Hop placed his cold hand onto her baby bump. "Your hand is freezing!" She kissed him.

"Good morning babe" Hop smiled softly and gently rubbed his hand over it.

"Morning." She smiled and watched him. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah I'm just thinking.. I'm sorry I wasn't there while you were in the hospital. I wanted to be as soon as I found out." He blinked a few times and turned away so she couldn't see him cry.

Joyce took his hand. And gently pulled his head back towards her. "Look at me Hop." Hop did. "It wasn't your fault missing what happened. It's okay. We're okay. That's all that matters."

He nodded. "You're right. So what exactly happened?"

"Braxton Hicks contractions. Basically false labor." She chuckled. "Stress induced. But I promise I'm okay now." She reassured. She got up and got dressed.

"Where are you going?" Hop looked confused.

"To go see this boy." She said pulling on a bra.

"No! Joyce. No." Hopper says sternly "you are not going to see him."

"But what if he's not that killer?"

"He is Joyce. This kid is dangerous." Hop grabs her arm stopping her from continuing.

"He's just a kid hop. He didn't have a loving family and he ended up with the wrong crowd. That doesn't make him bad!" She tried to pull

away to no avail.

"Joyce he feels no regret for what he's done. He's a sociopath!" Hop said with his teeth clenched. He tightened his grip on her arm. "You are not going to see him. Do you hear me?"

"James let go of my arm" Joyce says calmly, even though she's trembling. She's trying her hardest to not cry. "Who the hell gives you the right to tell me what I can and cannot do?"

Hop didn't let go. "Joyce it's not safe I'm trying to keep you safe."

She continued to attempt to remain calm. "James. Let go of me." She yanks and manages to pull out of his grip.

It's as if he snaps out of it. "Oh my god. I'm so sorry— did I? Did I hurt you?" He looked terrified. Tears filled his eyes as the thought of him hurting her dashed across his mind.

She looked down at her wrist as a red handprint was forming. She walked away grabbing her bag without saying anything.

Hop sat up. "Joyce. Joy! Wait please!" He hopped out of bed to follow her. He held the hotel door closed. "Talk to me. Please. I'm sorry" Hop looked terrified. He is terrified.

"Move" She said sternly. A few tears had slipped out by now.

Hop moved out of the way defeated. His hand gently brushed against hers as he let her walk out.

She couldn't help but start to cry as she stared down at the red mark on her wrist. Flashbacks of all sorts of marks and bruises came back from her time with Lonnie. His possessiveness over her. His attempt at full control.

She couldn't do it again. She wouldn't do it again. She in the moment kicked herself for thinking that Hop was different. She doesn't realize how different he is from Lonnie.

Hop was distraught. He couldn't believe what he had done. He hurt her. The one thing he never wanted to do. He couldn't just let her

leave like that. He had to make things right. He quickly threw on clothes and ran after her.

She was standing out by the elevator waiting for it.

He ran over "Joyce! Wait please! Baby."

She wiped her tears. "What? What could you possibly want."

"To talk. Please!" He pleaded.

She was hurt, mad, and hormonal. A deadly combination in this situation. "Oh so you can tell me what I can and cannot do?"

"No Joyce hear me out please." He tried again

"About what? What could you possibly want to talk to me about? How you hurt me? How you're trying to control every little thing I do?!" She was trying her best not to raise her voice past a loud whisper. They were after all in the hallway of a busy hotel.

"Yes! Because I'm here to apologize for caring about you. I'm sorry that I don't want him to hurt you! I'm sorry that I hurt you!" He was frustrated that she wouldn't listen.

"So it is about the kid? Of course!" She sighed and got in the elevator. Hop immediately followed. "Great so you're not gonna let me leave?"

"I really don't want you to go. I want you to be safe. I want you to hear me out. I want you to care that I care about you. I want you to just trust me for once and listen." He started to tear again.

"Just trust you for once and listen?" Joyce repeated back to him. "What the hell do you think I do normally. You vanish without a word. You magically end up in New York. You come back to your hotel room with some woman. All I ever do is trust you! I trusted you back then, when you slept with Chrissy Carpenter. Did you know she came looking for you while you were gone? Did you?" She's yelling now.

"No I didn't.." he sighed and held his head down low. "I know I've messed up. A lot.. what I'm trying to say is—"

She cut him off before he could finish. "What? Try to continue to tell me how unsafe this kid is. Try to get me to fucking 'trust you a bit?'" She snapped at him

"— no. That I love you and I'm sorry. I never meant to hurt you. I just wanted to protect you but you don't need it—" he looked down when she cut him off again.

"You know that's exactly what Lonnie would say after every time he'd hit me? Or make an excuse for hurting me some way? Why the hell should I believe that?!" Tears were streaming down her face by now.

"— because I'm not Lonnie. I—"

"You are exactly like Lonnie! No good! Deadbeat—" She stopped herself as she realized what she just said. She didn't mean it. She covered her mouth and started to sob. He wasn't anything like him truthfully but she got caught up in the heat of the moment. She saw the look on his face and her heart shattered into an irreparable, million little pieces.